

Nyx *a nocturnal*

issue 6

£5



MONSTERS



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Nyx, a *nocturnal*
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'The wriggling of serpents, in the depths of swamps and in dungeons their strange intertwinings, their combats with fangs, knots or venom will always be the exact image of human existence shot through from top to bottom by death and love.'

Georges Bataille et al., "Reptiles", *Encyclopedia Acephalica*.

A figure walks behind you.

Nyx, a Noctournal has brought together mystics, scribblers, artists and thinkers to describe the very darkest of fantasies and phantasms.

Sifting through the intense media-effluence of everyday life, a recurrent figure or disorientating buzz of evil emerges. Our morally hygienic, nutritionally balanced and CCTV secured lives seem always in jeopardy from the perils of some monster. But who is this monster? Or rather, what is the process of becoming monstrous? Is it, as Elaine L. Graham suggests, a study of human integrity transgressed? Or a reflection of how Western modernity has constructed and denied its outsiders as others? 'Dead are all the Gods', said Nietzsche, and yet why is it that wherever we bury our ghosts, demons, witches and dead they mysteriously come back to life as depressed aliens, consumerist zombies, mutating diseases and teenage vampires? Why, in an apparently ironic, secular and digitised age, do we still dream of these fiends? Is the monstrous always an excess of what needs to be repressed, what remains impure?

The monster enjoys a labyrinthine history, with the notion of evil and the devil slithering into the Judeo-Christian imagination via Zoroaster's distinction between good and evil, infusing into the demonologies of the Book of Revelation and the early Christian church. St. Anthony's temptations in the desert played out the earliest modern conflicts of infernal temptation, whilst medieval minds were plagued by grimoires, 'cunning folk' and impending apocalypse. Contemporary catastrophilia regarding ecological or economic meltdown rehearses our most pleasurably disturbing fixations with our end as a species, in the rips in the reality machine wherein escapes the weird. Etymologies are revealing: the 'monster' is a warning, a bad omen, whilst 'devil' comes from diabolus, a half-circle maybe, that which halves and destroys the whole. 'Grotesque' takes us back to the grotto, of underground religious sites shrouded in darkness, an appropriate place to contemplate the soul and its damnation. But enough of these masques. The monstrous is that which escapes any system, which is always outside, lurking, ready to penetrate and interrupt our ordered social and psychological economies with its sinister contagion.

You may judge our contributors based on their success in locating this dark heart of the monstrous. It may well be that this is a labyrinth without any exits: if so, take care, for footsteps seem to be approaching...

Dan Taylor, Editor
Winter 2011

Nyx, *a noctournal* Sixth Issue : Monsters

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Thanks to

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Cover Image

Stik/ photography by Sinikka Heden

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un-nameable thing

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"What philosophy implicitly admits, horror explicitly thinks: a profound fissure at the heart of the concept of life."

The relationship between theology and horror in the West invites a number of superficial comparisons: in the Eucharist there is both cannibalism and vampirism; in the Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions there is the resurrection of the dead; and in numerous instances the New Testament portrays the demonic possessions that elicit the healing powers of the Messiah. Indeed, considering the extent to which the horror genre deals with the themes of death, resurrection, and the demonic, one could argue that genre horror is a secular, cultural expression of theological concerns.

If we look more closely, however, we see that in many instances it is a concept of 'life' that mediates between theology and horror. We can even imagine our theologians carefully watching the classics of horror film, reflecting on the kind of 'life' common to both theology and horror: the relation between the natural and the supernatural (Aquinas watching *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*); the distinction between human and beast (Augustine watching *The Wolf Man* or *Cat People*); the coherence of the corpus mysticum (Paul watching *Revolt of the Zombies* or *I Bury the Living*); the problem of the afterlife (Dante watching the Italian silent film version of *L'Inferno*). But one need not imagine such scenarios, for many modern films deal with such issues, from David Cronenberg's early 'tissue horror' films, to Ingmar Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*, to Dario Argento's now-complete *Three Mothers* trilogy.

If both theology and horror deal with the concept of 'life,' then what exactly is this 'life' that lies at the limits of the thinkable? Aristotle gives us one clue. In the *De Anima* Aristotle explicitly thinks the question of life as a philosophical question, through the

concept of *psukhē* (often translated into English as "soul"): "It must be the case then that soul (*psukhē*) is substance as the form of a natural body which potentially has life, and since this substance is actuality, soul will be the actuality of such a body (1). There is, to borrow terms that Scholasticism would favour, an "ensoulment" or animation that thus takes place in hylomorphism, a process through which the soul gives form to matter, life to that which is non-living.

Aristotle gives us a slightly different picture, however, in *De Generatione et Corruptione*. Here the central question is not about the principle of life, but rather about the problem of morphology and change. Aristotle asks, how are "coming-to-be" and "passing-away" different from change in general? Are growth and decay merely examples within the larger genre of change? This in turn leads to a more fundamental question regarding the domain of the living: "What is 'that which grows'?" (2).

Aristotle's approach is to distinguish between different modalities of change. There are, first, the processes of alteration, which are qualitative (one thinks of a tree sprouting branches or an animal growing fur – the tree or animal remains the same kind of tree or animal). There are also the processes of coming-to-be and passing-away, which are substantial changes (as when one animal is eaten by another animal, the former undergoing modification in substance). Finally, there are the processes of growth and decay, which can involve changes in magnitude (growing larger or smaller). Now, while the first two are general processes of change that occur in the living and non-living, Aristotle implies that growth and decay are exclusive to the domain of the living. Why is

**Monster table*

	LIVING DEAD	UNDEAD	DEMON-BEAST	PHANTASM
Exemplar	The zombie	The vampire	Demonic possession; lycanthropy	The ghost, the spectre
Allegory	Working class, the mob, mass	Aristocratic, Romanticism	Bourgeois, the therapeutic	Divine-religious, the spirit, the soul
Avatars	Multitude, contagion	Blood, rats, bats, mist	Beast, animal, monster, chimera	Mediums, portents, signs
Ontology	Flesh	Blood	Meat	Spirit

this? In the case of growth, Aristotle gives us the example of eating. Though exclusive to the living, growth fundamentally has to do with changes across the substance of the living and non-living, changes that may be due to “the accession of something, which is called ‘food’ and is said to be ‘contrary’ to flesh,” and that involves the “transformation of this food into the same form as that of flesh”(3).

What philosophy implicitly admits, horror explicitly thinks: a profound fissure at the heart of the concept of life. Life is at once this or that particular instance of the living, but also that which is common to each and every instance of the living. Let us say that the former is the living, while the latter is Life (capital L). If the living are particular manifestations of Life (or that-which-is-living), then Life in itself is never simply this or that instance of the living, but something like a principle of life (or that-by-which-the-living-is-living). This fissure between Life and the living is basically Aristotelian in origin, but the fissure only becomes apparent in particular instances – we see it in the Scholastic attempt to conceptualise “spiritual creatures,” we see it in the problem of the life-after-life of resurrection, and we also see it in natural philosophy and the attempts to account for physiological anomalies and aberrations.

However, the most instructive examples of this fissure come from classic horror film, in particular the “creature feature” of film studios such as Universal or RKO. The proliferation of living contradictions in horror film constitutes our modern bestiary. Let us consider a hagiography of life in the relation between theology and horror: the living of the undead, the demon, and the phantasm. In each case there is an exemplary figure, an allegorical mode, a mode of manifestation, and a metaphysical principle that is the relation between philosophy and horror.

A simple table provides a comparison between these different types of monster (see above *). Generalisations such as these obviously have their limitations. But one thing to note is that in each case we have a form of life that at once repudiates ‘life itself’ for some form of non-life. As monsters, each departs in some way from a human norm, at the same time that they reflect those human norms. Note that often these monsters depart from the human at the literal level, while they reflect the human at the metaphorical level. Literally, zombies are an aberration of human biological life, though metaphorically they reflect all-too-human aspects of class, consumerism, or whatever the zombie’s stand-in may be. These



"Each of these monsters hold within themselves a contradiction ...The zombie is the animated corpse, the vampire is the decadence of immortality, the demon is at once a supernatural being and a lowly beast, and the spectre exists through materialisations of its immateriality."

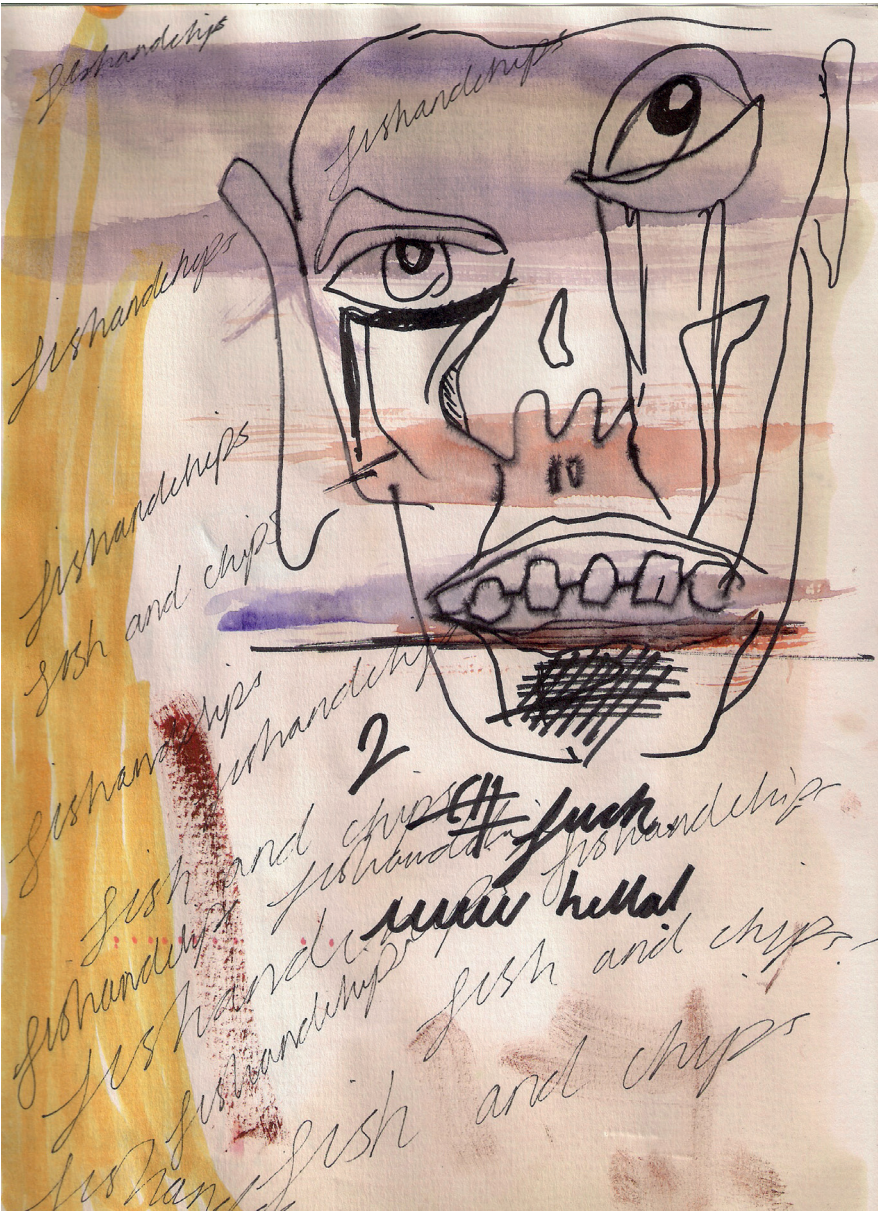


monsters are at once aberrations of the human and at the same time the exemplar of the human.

Each of these monsters hold within themselves a contradiction; they are, at the literal level, living contradictions. The zombie is the animated corpse, the vampire is the decadence of immortality, the demon is at once a supernatural being and a lowly beast, and the spectre exists through materialisations of its immateriality. And, in each case, the form of after-life works towards a concept of life that is itself constituted by a privation or a negation, a 'life-minus-something'; the basic Aristotelian concepts of flesh, blood, meat, and spirit are paradoxically living but without life. In this sense, horror expresses the logic of incommensurability between Life and the living.

These contradictions at the core of life are further developed by the weird fiction tradition. Consider the late-period works of H.P. Lovecraft as an example. In these stories, one often finds three forms of life: There is, first, the world of the living and the non-living (plants, animals, human beings), existing within the human-centric world of society, politics, and science. This is a world in which we find characters weighted down by deeply-ingrained ways of thinking about the world – rural vs. urban, regional vs. global, civilised vs. primitive, race vs. species, ancient vs. modern, and so on. In the midst of this all-too-human world, Lovecraft's characters discover remnants – often at a distant, furtive archaeological dig – of an advanced form of life that confounds all human knowledge about life as we know it. These types of beings – the "Old Ones" – are often characterised as an advanced race of other-dimensional beings that are discovered to have existed aeons prior to the appearance of human beings. This is the life that is so ancient it is alien (4).

This in itself is cause for horror to Lovecraft's characters. The strange, alien facticity of the remnants throws into abeyance all human presuppositions – history, biology, geology, cosmology – concerning the human and its relation to the world. But there is another element that pushes the works into



"The monster is a creature of norm and law, a form of life that is defined by its deviation from a norm, its aberration in the order of things, and its transgression of the law."

that intermediary zone of "the weird." In addition to these two forms of life, there is also a third form of life that appears in Lovecraft's stories. This third form of life often resists easy description, either in terms of the human world, or in terms of the Old Ones. Sometimes this third form of life is given an awkward name, such as "Elder Things" or "Shoggoths." Clark Ashton Smith once used the term "Ubbo-Sathla," while Frank Belknap Long used the phrase "The Space-Eaters." William Hope Hodgson preferred the more menacing and shapeless term "The Watchers." While this form of life is often named, more often than not it represents the very horizon of human thought to think this third form of life at all – hence Lovecraft's characters obliquely refer to them as "the unnameable" or the "nameless thing" – or better, in Ambrose Bierce's phrase, "the damned thing"...

This third form of life is, then, the nameless thing that is living, something alive apart from the categories of scientific classification, without a form-giving name – a living form without form. It is described by Lovecraft's characters in ways that are at once vague and highly detailed. In *The Shadow Out of Time*, for instance, the central character not only discovers remnants that reveal that this third form of life had actually once been alive, but, to his horror, he also discovers that they are still alive. The narrator begins by evoking the unreality of his situation: "Dream, madness, and memory merged wildly together in a series of fantastic, fragmentary delusions which can have no relation to anything real." But this is not enough, for what is then evoked is the strange objectivity of these delusions: "There was a hideous fall through incalculable leagues of viscous, sentient darkness, and a babel of noises utterly alien to all that we know of the earth and its organic life"(5).

There is more here than the menacing monster of classic creature-feature films. In these passages, what is horrific is not just that such nameless things are still alive, but, more importantly, that in their living they evoke in Lovecraft's characters the limits of thought – the limits of thought to think 'life' at all. The very terms of human thought fail to

"If the monster is that which cannot be controlled (the unlawful life), then the nameless thing is that which cannot be thought (the unthinkable life)."

encompass the nameless thing. In Lovecraft's novel *At the Mountains of Madness* one of the central characters attempts to describe the Shoggoths – an oozing hyper-complex form of life composed of mathematically grouped dots and a multitude of eyes:

Formless protoplasm able to mock and reflect all forms and organs and processes – viscous agglutinations of bubbling cells – rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile – slaves of suggestion, builders of cities – more and more sullen, more and more intelligent, more and more amphibious, more and more imitative...(6).

Lovecraft's characters are not insane – in fact, the source of their horror is the realisation that they are not hallucinating or suffering from "exhausted nerves." With the requisite melodramatic flair, Lovecraft's characters often express the wish that they were simply hallucinating or dreaming, for then they could dismiss what they encounter as pure subjectivism, and the self-world dichotomy would remain intact. The problem is that Lovecraft's characters come to verify this third form of life – but in a manner that is incommensurate to any form of rational verification. Note that Lovecraft's characters do register something, and they attempt to grasp that something through the senses and rationally; but both reason and the senses fail to render a coherent picture of what "it" is. The very categories of matter and form, actual and potential, origin and finality, growth, decay, and organisation – all these categories of thought flounder before a form of life that is at once oozing and mathematical, formless and geometric.

This unnameable thing cannot be reconciled with that of the profane world of human beings, or the ancient, alien world of the "Old Ones." The unnameable thing is also not simply the monster; at least in any traditional sense. The monster is a creature of norm and law, a form of life that is defined by its deviation from a norm, its aberration in the order of things, and its transgression of the law. Monsters are departures from the human (indeed it is precisely their uncanniness that makes them objects of horror). Monsters are

also often produced, or are by-products, of this norm or law – be it in terms of a divine Book of Nature, or in terms of the mad scientist playing God. Monsters are always monstrum, that which demonstrates, which testifies, and which inadvertently affirms the biological norm or political law.

The unnameable thing described in Lovecraft's stories is not a monster in this traditional sense. The Shoggoths do not even share the same reality with the human beings that encounter them – and yet this encounter takes place, though in a strange no-place that is neither quite that of the phenomenal world of the human subject or the noumenal world of an objective reality. Lovecraft's characters search for an adequate set of concepts to describe them but ultimately fail – they have material bodies, but not materiality “as we know it”; they have “intermittent lapses of visibility”; they can manifest themselves in our world and yet they have no fixed form.

In Lovecraft's stories the Shoggoths or Elder Things can barely be named, let alone adequately described or thought. And this is the crux of supernatural horror, the reason why life is “weird.” The threat is not

the monster, or that which threatens existing categories of knowledge. Rather, it is the unnameable thing, or that which presents itself as a horizon for thought itself. If the monster is that which cannot be controlled (the unlawful life), then the nameless thing is that which cannot be thought (the unthinkable life). Why can it not be thought? Not because it is something unknown or not-yet known (the mystical or the scientific). Rather, it is because it presents the possibility of a logic of life, though an inaccessible logic, one that is absolutely inaccessible to the human, the natural, and the earthly – an “entelechy of the weird.”

Eugene Thacker is a writer and associate Professor at The New School in New York. He is currently developing a series of books investigating the Horror of Philosophy, the first volume of which has just been published by Zero Books.

Christy Taylor is a musician and artist from south London. When not generating apocalyptic beats in his grotto he likes to cycle round on a broken bike, evading DWP fiends and making films. He does not blog, nor will he.

NOTES:

1. Excerpted from *After Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and *In the Dust of This Planet – Horror of Philosophy* vol. I (Alresford: Zero Books, 2011). *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin, 1986), II.1.412a, 157.
2. Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, trans. Harold Joachim, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), I.5.321a.30, 489.
3. Aristotle, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, I.5.321b.36-322a.1-3, 490.
4. This motif of the “ancient alien” is certainly not unique to Lovecraft. In the 19th century Flammarion and Wells dwelt on the topic, and in the latter part of the 20th century one repeatedly finds it in TV shows such as *In Search Of...* and *X-files*, as well as in a whole host of films, from *Planet of the Vampires* to *Alien*, not to mention occult art films such as *Lucifer Rising*...
5. H.P. Lovecraft, “The Shadow Out of Time,” in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin, 2004), 393.
6. H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, in *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin, 2001), 330.

Occasionally through talent, novelty and sheer persistence a graffiti artist captures the public imagination. Images make a mystical transition from being officially viewed as ephemera cluttering up the urban landscape to landmarks possessing "cultural value". Think Banksy in London a decade ago, SAMO in 1970s New York.

Over the last few years a source of much curiosity for Londoners in the East of the city has been the proliferation of the giant, ghostly stick people staring down from the sides of decaying buildings and peering out from dark corners and alleyways. Remarkably expressive and varied despite their formal simplicity, these strangely compelling compositions are the work of a mysterious artist known only as "Stik".

Interview by NICHOLAS GLEDHILL
Photos by SINIKKA HEDEN

Stik possesses a rare gift for expressing profound subtleties of human form and emotion through a minimalistic medium. His apparently naive, playful mode of representation amuses but is also disarming. It evokes the innocence of childhood, but dislocated into a decaying urban setting there is also a distinct sense of uneasiness, of innocence lost. The blank stares and silence of the mute figures (they never have mouths) and the expression conveyed by their posture show vulnerability. Often depicted huddled together in family groups or partially hidden behind the objects around them, as if taking cover, they seem perhaps traumatised by what they see around them as they look out into the streets, wary of what might still be around the corner, and this underlying element of social commentary makes Stik's work particularly interesting.

Having himself experienced many years in the care system and long periods of homelessness (his only formal artistic training being a GCSE), Stik is well placed to reflect on the experience of society's dispossessed. Much of his latest work was influenced by the rioting in England earlier this year, which he controversially described at the time as a "children's revolution" on Channel 4's 4thought programme, prompting a deluge of vitriol on the message boards from those elements of the population more comfortable with the 'pure criminality' and 'feral monsters' tags being provided by politicians and the reactionary press.

A notoriously elusive figure, Nyx finally managed to catch up with Stik during the closing days of a sell-out exhibition of his work at Graffik Gallery on Portobello Road to talk stik people, rioters and the general state of things.



*Top: Stik at his first exhibition at Graffik Gallery, Portobello Road, London.
Bottom: 'Tribes', 2011*





Left: Seen from Mare Street, Hackney.
Top: Victoria Park road, East London

What are the stik people?

They're emotional shorthand. They're what's left when everything is stripped away bar the emotions. They show how powerful those emotions can be.

So they express something under the surface, some emotional 'real' beneath the everyday façade, in a social or political sense maybe?

I use [my work] to express the emotional world, the emotional part of politics. I used it recently to try and express what was going on emotionally behind the riots in the UK. Nobody seemed quite to be able to put their finger on why it happened or who

these people are, but there's no mistaking what those emotions are. The emotions are very potent and powerful and there's a very destructive force there but clearly very strong reasons, these people aren't doing it just for the hell of, they're very frustrated and that's what I was trying to convey.

You described the riots as a children's revolution.

I said that at the time because I mainly saw a lot of children running about, but now I actually think it's something broader than that. That was my initial reaction at the time, at a time when nobody was really having a sensible



Left: Outside Cable Studios, South London.
Bottom: Broadway market, Hackney.



dialogue about who these people really are. There are clearly class issues, social issues . . . I think the fact that the government are talking about cutting off housing benefit for people who were involved, I think that speaks volumes about who the government think these people are.

So who would you say they are?

The rioters are us. People, the media and people, are really trying to distance themselves from the rioters but actually they are us and we are reacting against ourselves. We are rioting and we are reacting against the rioters and trying to cover it up and it's like this big

dysfunctional family, our society's behaving like this big dysfunctional family and there's a lot of violence and retaliation and I think we need to consolidate that bridge between the different social strata and communities.

I've heard you call the stik people 'spirits of the dispossessed'.

Yeah I think they're spirits. It's about something latent. When you strip away everything, all possessions, all features, everything else from your being then all that's really left is the emotions and that's what I try to capture. When you don't have anything else all you have left are your emotions.



Stik's exhibition at Graffik Gallery, Portobello Road, London.

What sort of emotions do you think are around at the moment?

I think there's a kind of shifty, slightly frightened, looking over the shoulder; worried feeling. Tired, weary, but with a kind of heartbreaking, uplifted kind of positive feel. Weary but with a kind of heartbreaking optimism.

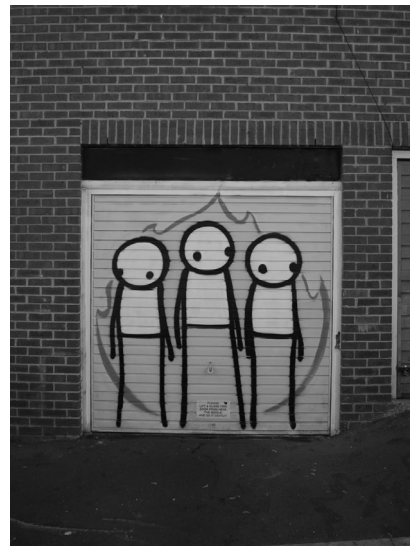
Your plans for the future?

Hitting the streets hard. This is the last of four solo [gallery] shows and now I'll be hitting the streets again, here and also in Poland and hopefully other places I won't divulge just now.

Stik is a street artist and visionary, whose dreamy figures are exhibited throughout the secret spaces of Hackney and surrounding areas. www.stik.org.uk // stiklondon@yahoo.co.uk

Nicholas Gledhill is a writer and teacher whose research interests include Pepsi Max, pornography, Lacan and the beach.

Sinikka Heden is a journalist,



Stik in Clarence Road, Hackney during the London riots in August 2011.

Haunting the present, inventing the future

“ For the first time in thirty years, the right has lost control of the future. It’s hard to think of a moment when an ideology was so immediately and so completely discredited as neoliberalism was in 2008.”

interview by DANTAYLOR

Mark Fisher's 2009 *Capitalist Realism* has energised political discussions in the UK and US following its publication by innovative imprint Zero books. Whilst articulating a new conceptual framework to describe familiar bureaucratic fox-traps, Fisher has effectively shifted focus towards the psychological terrains of capitalist control. His K-Punk blog features a powerful body of writings of music, politics and film, whilst representatives of groups like the University for Strategic Optimism cite Mark's ideas in inspiring their creation. His eagerly-anticipated new work, *Ghosts of My Life*, will be published by Zero next year. Here Mark talks to Nyx about political weak-points, hauntings of the near future and making holes in the reality system.

*Can you tell us what are your intentions with this new work, *Ghosts of My Life*, and how you'd like it to be received?*

MARK FISHER: Even though I'm known to many as a writer on music, my first book, *Capitalist Realism*, includes very few references to music. *Ghosts of my Life* will put that right! Unlike *Capitalist Realism*, it isn't a single essay, but a collection of writings, mostly on music, but also on film, television and fiction. At the core of the book are my reflections on 'hauntology' – a concept derived from Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, but which has taken on an (un)life of its own in the past five years. The word 'hauntology' was initially used in a fairly loose way to refer to a confluence of musics that had a spectral feel. But it gradually took on a more rigorous meaning as it became clear that the 'hauntological' provided a way to understand and analyse the way postmodern culture was developing in the early 21st century. The work of the Ghost Box label, for instance, evokes the popular modernisms of the postwar social democratic period (the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, brutalist architecture, paperbacks). It was quickly clear that what might at first have seemed like a merely diverting stroll down memory lane actually pointed to a crisis of cultural time. Because the futures promised by that popular modernism didn't arrive. In conditions where, just as Fredric Jameson predicted in his highly prescient writings on postmodernism, pastiche and retrospection have become so taken for granted that we don't notice them any more, we've lost any sense of the present. My claim is that hauntology is the closest thing we have to a *zeitgeist*; but it is a paradoxical *zeitgeist*, in that it articulates a broken sense of time. The difference between hauntology and most of the culture that surrounds it is that hauntology acknowledges this failure of the present, instead of simply exemplifying it.

In *Ghosts of my Life*, I bring together most of my statements on hauntology as a 21st century cultural phenomenon, but I also look back at some of the futures that were lost. There's a personal dimension to all this, of course – I am old enough to have my expectations shaped by a popular modernist culture which has

disintegrated over the course of my lifetime, and which survives now as traces and echoes. But it's crucial to keep alive all the dialectical ambiguities of being nostalgic for modernism. The book isn't about the good old days; it's about keeping faith with the spirit of popular modernism, which entails rejecting any temptation to return to the past.

Another sense of the 'ghosts' in the title is depression, something that has intermittently afflicted me throughout my life. Like *Capitalist Realism*, *Ghosts of my Life* is in part an attempt to think through the relation of this affective pathology to wider cultural issues.

I suppose many of the book's themes come together in the music of Burial. There's a particular quality of sadness in Burial's music – a 21st century melancholia – that connected with many people, and *Ghosts of my Life* is trying to get to the source of that sadness.

In 2009 you offered a remarkable analysis of a collective ideology of cynical self-defeat you called 'capitalist realism', something which has psychologically inhibited the Left from mounting an effective challenge to neoliberal capitalism. Would you update this analysis today, given the increasingly reactionary nature of democratic politics in light of the worsening economic crisis? Have psychological techniques of control shifted since 2009?

MARK FISHER: Well, 2009 was a cusp moment. The bank crises had already happened by the time that the book had come out, which meant that the moment of neoliberal high pomp was already over. But it didn't feel like that, and in some ways it still doesn't. Neoliberalism has invaded our unconscious just as it has infiltrated practically every institution. It is a whole reality system, which doesn't just collapse in one go. But what we are seeing are massive holes in the fabric, which are emerging far too quickly for them to be fixed in anything but a gimcrack way. Before 2008, neoliberals used to say that everything but capitalism was impossible. Now it's clear that capitalism – at least in its neoliberal mode – is also impossible. It's an extraordinary time, truly extraordinary. Capitalist realism has not disappeared, but it has changed form, from the ebullient bullying of



"It is a whole reality system, which doesn't just collapse in one go. But what we are seeing are massive holes in the fabric, which are emerging far too quickly for them to be fixed in anything but a gimcrack way."

pre-2008 – you better get on board with this because nothing else will work – to something more desperate: we all have to make this work, because the alternative is total catastrophe. Parliamentary politics is still caught in the pre-2008 moment, trying to shore up or reform a system that has already collapsed. But part of the reason that parliamentary politics became so decadent in the first place was that, with the decline of working class solidarity, the only significant forces acting upon it from outside were those representing big business. What we've seen over the last 18 months is an enormous resurgence of extra-parliamentary forces – in everything from the Arab Spring to the student militancy and the riots here. In the UK, that hasn't coalesced into an agent or a series of agents that can exert any kind of sustained pressure on the ruling class, but it's early days yet.

Since the abuse of law following the August 2011 riots, meaning that many young people are now receiving long prison sentences for relatively minor crimes, the left seems to have fallen into despair

again - unable to connect with urban working-class movements, whilst its own protest and marches campaigns have similarly stagnated. How might an opposition in this country mount an effective resistance and overthrow of what you call Cameron and co's 'Bullingdon Club Swindle'? What weak points and opportunities can you identify?

MARK FISHER: The weak points are everywhere – what's missing is an agent that could take advantage of the massive disarray that the ruling class is currently in. For the first time in thirty years, the right has lost control of the future. It's hard to think of a moment when an ideology was so immediately and so completely discredited as neoliberalism was in 2008. This year in the UK, we've seen the hacking scandal, which implicates the whole British ruling class in a network of shady complicities, the riots, appalling growth figures, rising unemployment All that Cameron has to offer is his public school insouciance and plutocratic confidence; he and Osborne clearly have no serious policies, only vacuous calls for us to keep smiling and do something.



"All that Cameron has to offer is his public school insouciance and plutocratic confidence; he and Osborne clearly have no serious policies, only vacuous calls for us to keep smiling and do something. I don't think this persuades very many people".

I don't think this persuades very many people; all the signs are that discontent and disaffection are spreading. What keeps it all going is not any kind of positive belief, but principally two things. The first is the idea that there really is no alternative, that this might be grim, but there isn't any other way, we have to grin and bear it ... The other is the sense that, even if we aren't at all persuaded by the Great Bullingdon Club Swindle rhetoric, there's nothing we can do to stop it from happening.

We need a multiplicity of strategies to deal with this. Now more than ever it's a mistake to retreat from the so-called 'mainstream'. But that doesn't mean we have to confine ourselves to the narrow parameters of already existing mainstream culture – the point is that things are now unstable and we simply don't know what's possible. What's happening is a collapse of what, until 2008, was seen as the centre ground. The terrain is now wide open. I think that Alain Badiou is right and that our current situation is now akin to the very beginnings of the labour movement – we need the same spirit of invention that led to the formation of trade

unions and workers' political parties in the first place. Part of the spell that postmodernism still casts over us is the sense that history is behind us, that we can't invent institutions or organisations in the same way that people could in the past. But, if the conditions which allowed the workers' movement to thrive have now declined, that doesn't mean that solidarity is no longer possible; it just means it's no longer possible in the old way. The crucial question is how to co-ordinate the disaffection which is certainly there, and we are in a moment when technology allows unprecedented levels of co-ordination. But we have to ruthlessly eliminate any nostalgia for the forms of organisation made possible under Fordism. Those conditions won't return. Instead of organising around the Fordist worker; we need to organise around the precarious worker. Practically everyone is precarious to some degree; imagine how powerful a solidarity which could bring precarious workers together could be.

TO HAVE DONE WITH THE JUDGEMENT OF DOGS

text by SOFIA HIMMELBLAU
images by LAURA OLDFIELD FORD

A version of this article sparked something of a 'troll riot' when it appeared on the University for Strategic Optimism's blog the day after the August riots tore through London. A few months on, it has been revised to reflect the broader context of those striking events.

Keep calm and carry on. This seemingly innocuous little phrase has a lot to answer for. Not only is the implicit, pernicious conservatism deeply nauseating, but also, as far as it concerns me here, it is the way in which its reiteration in light of recent riots so neatly encapsulated a whole whirlwind of troubling discourses that is so telling. This innocent sounding platitude summed up so much about the politics that raised its ugly (broom) head above the deceptively placid surface of London's residential neighbourhoods at that moment.

Between the 4th and 10th of August 2011, rioting on an unprecedented scale tore through England's urban fabric and with it came an also largely unprecedented response on the part of the media, politicians

and the public. Particularly badly affected on the 8th of August, a night that brought some of the most extensive destruction, were a number of neighbourhoods that have over many years become starkly divided by the phenomenon of gentrification, areas where the expansion of middle-class intra-urban settlement has gone side-by-side with the increasing marginalisation of working class communities. One such area, Clapham in south west London, became the media focus for a very public campaign in the wake of the rioting. This was a campaign all too eager to associate itself with the ideological resonances so effectively distilled in the 'Keep Calm' slogan, and that was hence promoted all too eagerly by a media whose class interests were nakedly exposed in the urgency with which they sought to narrativise and re-present the reaction of 'ordinary' (i.e. middle-class) Londoners. I refer to the #riotcleanup, a Twitter campaign that became all-out propaganda when residents and the media showed up in force upon the riot-afflicted streets. Wielding weapons of symbolic cleansing, this smug and shell-shocked



"a self-reliant nation of plucky, understated underdogs, who in true 'blitz-spirit,' stoic and obedient, sipped tea whilst the bombs fell. This is largely bollocks"



bunch set off to wage all-out aesthetic war on shattered glass and whitewash the dark stain that had been left upon their territory. They'd bought their brooms, now they would oust the disease, expel the monsters from their midst.

Keep calm and carry on was their chirpy motto, the coronated slogan that began, lest we forget, as Ministry of Information propaganda, the message of a king to his subjects. These five pathetic words have come to encapsulate a mythic British self-image, forever frozen in its 'finest hour.' The 1940s nostalgia that the slogan so nakedly excretes articulates the delusional foundation-myth of 'modern' Britain. It conjures up one of the few occasions Britain could count itself on the right side of history, standing bravely against fascism, a self-reliant nation of plucky, understated underdogs, who in true 'blitz-spirit,' stoic and obedient, sipped tea whilst the bombs fell.¹

This is largely bollocks of course, Britain isn't even a nation, it never has been, rather it's the imperial project of a certain class. It wasn't the fight against fascism but the drive

to protect colonial interests from foreigners that motivated those directing the war-effort. Such 'self-reliance,' born during the intensive state control of the war, often emerged more accurately in a 'blitz-spirit' that used the destruction as cover for large-scale looting. Of the 4,584 looting cases tried during the nine month height of the blitz, 48 percent of those arrested were juveniles, a number of whom were caught stripping clothes from corpses and cutting the fingers from the dead to get at rings. Still feeling nostalgic?

It's little surprise that in moments of turmoil, war, or economic collapse, the superficial ideological mask slips. The posturing, re-packaged 'blitz-spirit' cracks, the colonial, Kipling-esque 'keeping your head' shatters and a deeper ideology that such narratives attempt to cover and allay, that of accumulation and naked self-interest, erupts to the surface with nihilistic ferocity.

The strikingly middle-class, broadly white efforts to sweep the issues of inequality under the carpet of a simulated big-society

“Wielding weapons of symbolic cleansing, this smug and shell-shocked bunch set off to wage all-out aesthetic war on shattered glass and whitewash the dark stain that had been left upon their territory.”

photo-op has been telling. The doughty bunch of volunteer cleaners, the substitution for a non-existent community, appeared right on cue to wrap up the media narrative following a night of London's most extensive social unrest in decades. Even Mayor Boris had leisurely returned from holiday to be snapped with the broom-wielding bourgeoisie of Clapham as they amassed for a bit of symbolic social cleansing.

For all their passive-aggressive conscience-salving however, the outraged ensemble with their newly purchased brooms still need to face up to the rampant inequalities and social exclusion that a gentrification of urban neighbourhoods (often driven largely by them) exacerbates.

Drawing on an insidious tradition of using aesthetics and 'pop-up' events to keep vacant properties warm whilst the market is depressed and to make sure that the capital locked up in them doesn't depreciate, this sweeping caricature of so-called neighbourliness only served to extend such

decorative follies, papering over the cracks in the broken big-society fantasy of a jolly 'local community' firmly welded to the fag-end of empire. Such ornamental efforts largely only succeeded in covering over the disintegration of localised economies with twee décor.

The broom-brigade might have eagerly sought to apply a big-society sticking-plaster to the social destruction (which the gentrification agenda directly feeds into) and the devastation wrought by widespread internecine urban conflict, but art and brooms isn't going to fix this particular mess. Only the radical redistribution of wealth in a society not defined around individual accumulation is going to do that. It's not 1940: the destruction of the urban fabric is not wrought by foreign bombs, but by kids from the broomistas' own neighbourhoods. They can pretend to pick up a few bits of litter for the cameras, but that is a fact that cannot be wiped away so easily.

This keep-calm-and-carry-on claptrap is not only impeccably bourgeois, it is also the language of war. Behind the thinly-

veiled symbolism of social cleansing/cleaning up the area – for which read gentrification and further exclusion/segregation – emerged the rhetorical division between ‘real’ Londoners and their opposite, the therefore ‘inauthentic’ Londoners. Effectively, the idea that ‘these people,’ the rioters, were somehow non-citizens was hence entrenched. All of the Twitter commentary that supposedly organised the clean-up events (or was it the Young Conservatives Clapham branch?) parroted the same ideological soundbites – this is the ‘real London,’ this is the ‘true London’ blah, blah, yawn, blah. In doing so it established a discourse that serves primarily to divide those who have ‘the right to the city’ from those who do not, but also from those who can expect to be treated as citizens under the rule of law, and those who are excluded by virtue of their status as non-citizens.

When the rioting spread so far and so wide that the narrative claiming that it was all caused by ‘outsiders’ and ‘trouble-makers’ from elsewhere coming into the area became untenable, another, still more sinister discourse unfolded. The destruction was instead the work of ‘feral rats,’ ‘dogs’ and ‘animals,’ sub-humans who were therefore strategically positioned by the language of carefully edited media loops, depicting the same self-righteous soundbites, to take the place of rhetorically excluded non-citizens. As non-citizens, these were people who could expect no protection therefore, from the coming ‘all necessary measures’ that the media agenda was simultaneously lining-up to be unleashed – in other words they would be subjected to a renewed and increased state violence. Like the taxonomies of colonialism and the language that surrounded Haussmann’s attacks on the Parisian working class in the 19th century, this language exists to determine not only who has the right to the city, but whose life counts for something, is valuable, and to mark out those whose life is not. Rhetorical dehumanisation in a tried and tested tactic for attacking political opponents, not only as an attempt to justify their domination or destruction, but also as a means of generating unity, galvanising support

and a securing a power-base amongst other groupings.

In areas such as Clapham which, beneath the surface, are so strongly divided and segregated along class lines by years of gentrification, perhaps it is wishful thinking to even claim there exists such a thing as a local community in any meaningful sense. If it does exist, as this episode illustrates, this community certainly appears to be one that cannot operate other than by the exclusion of certain individuals, by the rhetorical and indeed physical expulsion of non-citizens and ‘feral rats’ from within its midst. Such a community, predicated upon exclusion, was how Carl Schmitt defined society (and he was a Nazi). This community therefore, that comes together over their dustpans only does so in the specific exclusion of their rhetorical other. This other is the poor, the often BME youths who have felt compelled to acts of nihilistic aggression against a society that marginalises them and offers no future, but amongst which and as part of which they live. They are to be cast out rather than be kept within society. Surely for a community to exist in any desirable sense however, *all* its constituents need to be treated as part of that community rather than expelled and excluded, cast as non-citizens.

In the wake of the riots the aims of such an agenda swiftly emerged with chilling predictability. Cameron cynically snatched the opportunity for a lurch to the right, spouting disingenuous platitudes and feigning his best impression of frothing moral diatribe to conceal a classically neoliberal sleight of hand. Beneath the eminently hypocritical moralising lay the real goal of this state of exception, militarised policing and the punitive exclusion of certain classes from an increasingly diminished social welfare system. This is a system that in his most red-faced, orgasmic moments he dreams of annihilating once and for all, condemning the poor to a return to the workhouse and the remainder to a pseudo-fascist police state. For all the ideological verbal effluence ejected by Cameron regarding morality, the ultimate social and material causes of such unrest are well-understood by him and his class. A blind

"This is a system that in his most red-faced, orgasmic moments he dreams of annihilating once and for all, condemning the poor to a return to the workhouse and the remainder to a pseudo-fascist police state."

refusal to acknowledge such causes but rather to responsabilise and pin the blame upon morally deviant individuals is the trademark of neoliberal class war.

Cameron tripped over himself to declare an "all-out war on gangs and gang culture" and gleefully turned towards the "suppression policing" of the US, who have it seems, taken time out from sharing policing tactics with Middle-Eastern dictators to export their particular brand of armed enforcement to the UK. Cameron has hired the so-called supercop William Bratton, notorious proponent of militarised 'zero-tolerance' policing. Bratton does lucrative consultancy for police forces throughout Europe, Mexico and Israel, and is chairman of Kroll, a corporation running security contracting in Iraq and advising companies and hedge funds on internal 'economic security'. He's the kind of guy your average Etonian wants on his side in such a class war.

The 'successes' of Bratton, lauded in the right-wing press, melt into air in the face of the reality of his tactics. His stylistic mainstays are the militarisation of law enforcement, criminalisation en masse of whole swathes of society, institutionalised racial profiling and myriad new offences – mostly around low-level 'behaviour' issues. Supported by a rabid press, force-feeding ruling class interests down the throat of public discourse, these tactics result in mass incarceration, deportation, and the extension of exclusion and punishment beyond the criminal justice system into already dire social provision and employment opportunities.

The police however, who, lest we forget, started these riots in the first place by shooting a man dead, are already increasingly adopting militaristic strategies that appear more counterinsurgency warfare than bobby on the beat. There have been around 1500 deaths in UK police custody, shootings or pursuits since 1990: just to put that in perspective, that's roughly double the amount of British soldiers killed in conflict during the same period, Iraq I & II, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, the Balkans

and Sierra Leone put together.

And now, we hear people clamouring for rioters to be stripped of their right to social support, welfare and access to housing. Not only does this lynchmob spite feast upon pseudo-fascist rhetoric, it's also downright stupid – even generous commentary would have to accuse it of being counterproductive. In truth such policies enact a disgraceful form of collective punishment on rioters' families, taking their inspiration from war criminals, recalling the Israeli policy of bulldozing militants' family homes, a crime banned under the Geneva Convention. Spineless, nasty and obsequious, local councils have eagerly leapt upon this bandwagon; they smelt blood and votes in hammering a hated minority. This is to further the extension of that rhetorical state of exception, which the sweepers so conveniently set up, into the reality of citizenship, and it represents the thin end of a wedge. In calling for such a policy not only is the implication made that those who rioted can be directly correlated in the public perception with benefits claimants – and in terms of housing this also clearly feeds into a certain far-right discourse that has been bubbling under the surface in recent years regarding access to housing and immigration – but it also represents the further dismantling of the principle of universalism in the welfare state. What next? All those with a criminal conviction stripped of benefits? Further down the line perhaps also access to healthcare on the NHS? What are the implications of this when you consider that the government's social policies have often resulted in the criminalisation en masse of a large section of certain socio-economic or racial groups? It potentially implies the declaration of whole swathes of people as non-citizens, even further excluded from society. Whilst this might be popular on the right, it can only lead to further poverty, resentment and logically further crime and social unrest. Ultimately when social provision becomes something to be earned rather than a right, however problematically constituted, you kill the philosophical heart of the welfare state stone-cold dead. All of the

gains of socialism are undone and we are back to the grinding misery and injustice of the workhouse.

Some have argued that this isn't about class, that these riots were not an act of class warfare, although it should be pointed out that the attack by broadly one class of people on broadly another class of people seems to fall pretty squarely within that definition. Whatever is the case, the response to the riots from the media and mainstream public discourse has most definitely been pure, unadulterated class war – just because the rioters themselves may not have had a conscious class motivation, although that is debatable, this does not mean that the response to them has not. We have seen an uncompromising and 'robust' reassertion of control and social order in a physical but also ideological sense, from a bourgeoisie that feels threatened. If you cannot see the class dynamic at play here you either don't want to see it, or you buy into the glib Blairite assertion that Britain is somehow now a classless society.

What we saw in the tiresome performance from the broom-wielding mob was the bourgeoisie closing ranks, symbolically running a certain 'monstrous underclass' out of town. Unlike the villagers with their pitchforks surrounding Dr. Frankenstein's lab however, this is the populist, bourgeois mob, motivated not just out of fear, but also a hefty dose of class hatred. The same 'underclass' they rhetorically construct are the very people that the state seeks to set-up and fit-up, to denigrate and cast out, a class created precisely through ideology. This is a class constructed by the simultaneous, three-decade, intensified bourgeois assault on working class communities, institutions, industry and space. This, coupled with an evacuation of the working class from public life – to be replaced by the ideologically constructed trope of a desperate underclass whose real, concrete existence is precisely the product of this ideology – is used as a weapon for the destruction of working class solidarity, and hence class power. This spectacularised class is likewise deployed as the rhetorical

justification for the redistribution of wealth, power and legal protection from the poor to the rich. Increasing inequality and exploitation is fundamentally at the heart of this project.

This so-called underclass are precisely the group of people who are already under attack from all sides in terms of a hostile media, benefit cuts, unemployment, lack of jobs, lack of housing, lack of educational opportunities, police racism and aggression. In a scaling up of the aforementioned community politics evidenced in Clapham, the British state attempts to cast a whole class of people as enemies within, responsible for all manner of society's ills through their 'feckless,' 'immoral' and 'animalistic' behaviour. In doing so they seek to create a group that all of those who are 'all in this together' can hate equally, and around which the illusion of the big society can coalesce. This reveals the big society as the bourgeois project that it always was all along – defined in opposition to an excluded class for which the public services and welfare that this ideology seeks to dismantle were essential. The underclass was constructed through successive policies of ruling elite and conveniently serves the function of an excluded other; usefully legitimising the Right's authoritarian entrenchment of class power whilst ex-progressives look on cheering and waving brooms in the air.

What we need instead of this exclusionary imitation of a community is rather a social solidarity that is non-exclusionary, that never panders to fascistic rhetoric and that works together in striving for a truly democratic and egalitarian society. What unites us should not be a common hatred or fear but a common humanity. Once we acknowledge this we can then certainly unite in common struggle against forces that would seek to divide us against one another; attempting as they do to divert our anger; even whilst they partition our access to the vital means by which to live full and fulfilling lives, simply according to our perceived usefulness to capital.

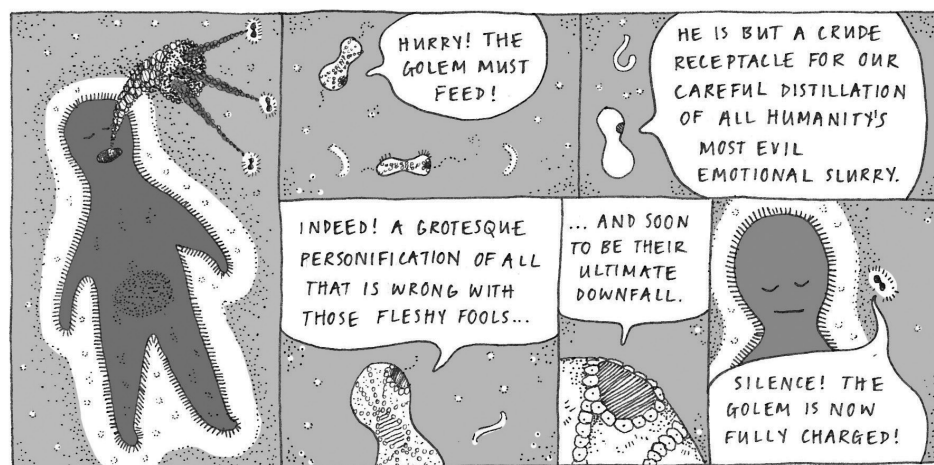
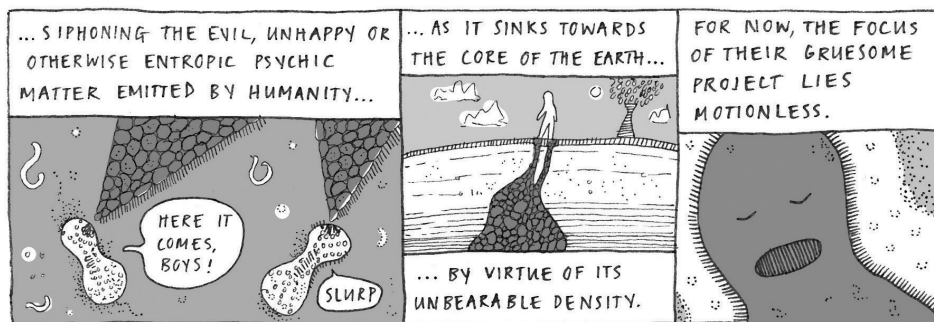
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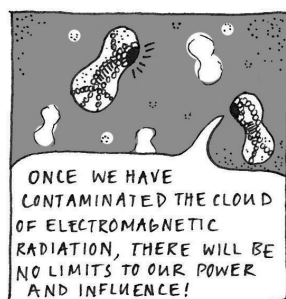
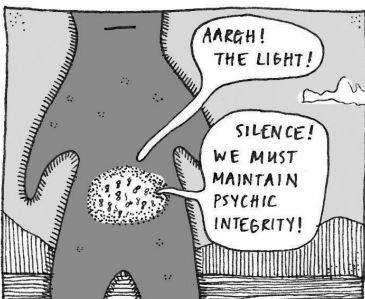
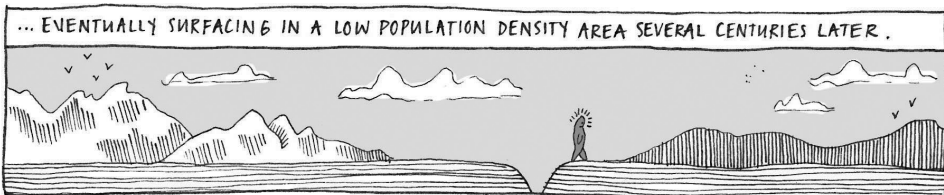
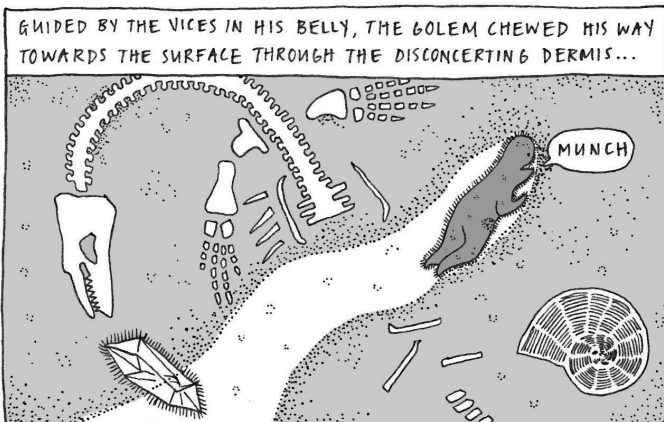
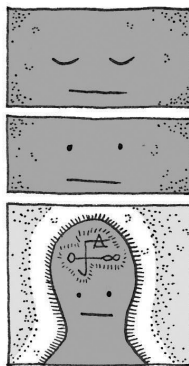
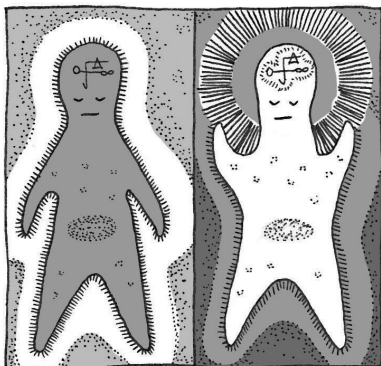
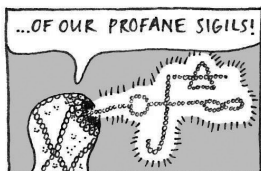
1. Perhaps ironically, but certainly tellingly, the slogan has also often featured amongst the images on the far-right English Defence League's website, as well as previously featuring as the group's Facebook status update (www.facebook.com/EDL.EnglishDefenceLeague.NS/posts/235238076510718) and as a motto during their marches/demos (<http://englishdefenceleague.org/tommy-robinson-challenges-david-cameron-to-a-live-debate/>).

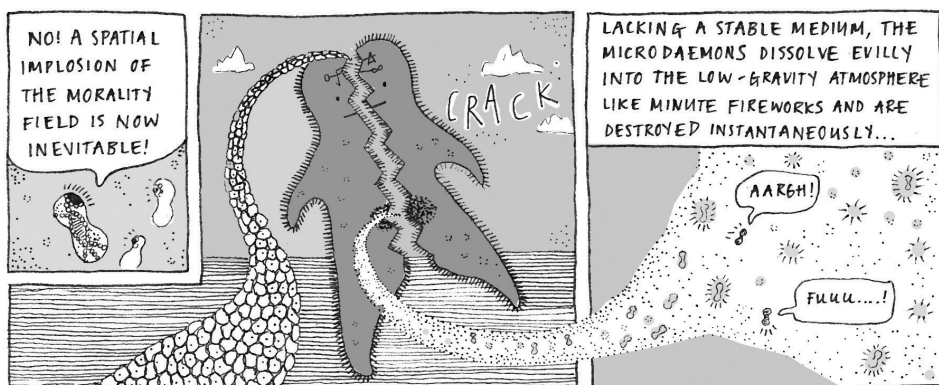
Dr. Sofia Himmelblau is a faculty member of the University for Strategic Optimism. Their course programme for 2011-12, entitled Undressing the Academy, Or, The Student Handjob has recently been published by Minor Compositions.

Laura Oldfield Ford is a writer and visionary of contemporary riots and ruins. Her collected Savage Messiah zines have just been published by Verso. lauraoldfieldford.blogspot.com // savagemessiah@hotmail.co.uk

ASCENSION







Emix Regulus is a cosmic savant based in Brighton. She has both collaborated with Frater Alarph and worked independently in a continual resistance against reductive reason. www.microcosmic-orbit.com // helloemix@gmail.com

Monstrum impuissant:
NOTES TO A NOCTURNAL

by PHIL SAWDON

No. 7n

27th February 1955

Dear Nyx,

I am the seventh line that strained the krack of doom. Something and nothing ... stuff and nonsense ... monkey business in wolf's clothing. The fourth is drawing the impotent and monstrous verbiage that documented this passer-by whilst The Marsh Villages were draining through its gaping mouth.

Time is, of course, noise inside the head and we would do well to recognise, yet not define, the lurid occasions we opened that particular outrage.

Oh dear!

Me oh my, it's ever so light in here.

I'll see and say no more; however in the interim please could you confirm that those prints in the dust are relative and are as large as a moon on the perfumed page?

René Hector, SEATHWAITE

Editor: We are sorry that we ate your letters, René, we accept 'tis a magical hat after all. In the meantime we have passed your request to Pierre [Dénys de Montfort] in our Malacology section.

* * *

No. 6y

3rd March 1502

Cher Nyx,

It seems that you summonsed them from my ancient slumber, unrecognised words from Hectorian theories ... Splidge, fliminationality, clong, potato, flopinality, plipping, rantoncicism, fuckity, whilst phenomerised.

This is an icy culture, touching, relative to me whilst twice the two melodies whispered that you, Nyx, might be The Pencil Genie of 1502.

I have a figment of my mind and powders of jaded alchemy that can only be worn by the first person to name ...

Please note that nobody will forever remain undesirable until we are turned back to smitten sheep wandering, dressed as diamonds, through the spaces in the boundary.

I'll leave it with you ...

Madame Pipe, formerly of LOUGHBOROUGH

EDITOR: We agree Madame Pipe, we are duly charged.

If you have any inclination to reply as to whether your world has gone mad (or is it you?) then we can confirm that it will be utterly useless.

Robert [Boyle] will start work on it immediately.

No. 5x

8th October 1971

Beste Nyx,

In an original copy there was poetic and semiotic parking for 300 Spartans. Please tell me why is the play of use and usage and all that it was meant to see why we might learn to see?

Meanwhile I'm asking René to take the donkey [that ate the pencil] to be watered in the half-life. Empusa will take the eye and talk to the ass about his leg.

My sincere apologies ... I shouldn't have started ... now I've got to hurry ... the

man-eating horses are in a panic at the Games ... see what tomorrow brings.

Jacques Taché, LADBROKE GROVE

EDITOR: At the moment there are two parking spaces. The one you can see in the frame is the allegory becoming drawing. The other guards the roads and devours the travelling concepts.

No. 4a

20th November 1950

Kära Nyx,

I am the fourth line that is foolish and stupid. My monsters are within and without. I've spoken to Marion about putting them outside.

My pencil can feel threatened by the three-headed hounds around him, who seem to want to eat him up, when in fact he is the greedy marker who wants to do the eating and I have to concede the theory.

Can you draw it?

Gabriel Chêne, APORIA

EDITOR: We are glad that you enjoy the journal, Gabriel. The first answer to your question is yes but remember that you can't draw and secondly perhaps you should try impotently representing impotence within an-other voice.

No. 3p

13th July 2011

Dilecti Nyx,

Anon and on anon?

EDITOR: Good question.
Let's leave it as that ... a few words.

Phil Sawdon is an artist and writer with numerous publications on drawing and the visual arts. Sawdon co-edits the literature section of Stimulus Respond and works in collaboration with Deborah Harty as Humhyphenhum.



by AMADEO POLICANTE

In one night we broke down about a hundred superstitious Pictures; and seven Fryars hugging a Nunn; and the Picture of God and Christ; and divers others very superstitious; and 200 had been broke down before I came. We took away 2 popish Inscriptions with 'Ora pro nobis' and we beat down a great stoneing Cross on the top of the Church.

- From the Journal of William Dowsing of Stratford, parliamentary visitor, appointed under a warrant from the Earl of Manchester, for demolishing the superstitious pictures and ornaments of churches &c., within the county of Suffolk, in the years 1643–1644.

The number of broken windows pales in comparison to the number broken spells - spells cast by a corporate hegemony to lull us into forgetfulness of all the violence committed in the name of private property rights and of all the potential of a society without them. Broken windows can be boarded up [...], but the shattering of assumptions will hopefully persist for some time to come.

- From the Peasant' Revolt N30 Black Bloc Communiqué by ACME Collective. (Leaflet distributed during the Seattle Riots of 1999).

FRANCISCAN PROFANATORS, OR, THE RADICAL PACIFISM OF A BROKEN WINDOW.

On August 10 1566, the feast-day of St. Lawrence, the holy chapel of the Sint-Laurensklooster was defaced and invaded by an enraged crowd, at the end of the pilgrimage from Hondschoote to Steenvoorde. What propelled the rioters remains unknown. It has been suggested that the initial spark of what came to be known as the *Bildesturm*, or the *Iconoclastic fury*, may have been outrage over a harsh punishment inflicted by a Catholic priest on a young Protestant child caught stealing from the box of offerings and donations. Whatever the truth, iconoclastic attacks spread rapidly throughout the country and resulted in the destruction of not only images but all sorts of decorations and fittings in churches and other religious properties.

The attacks reached the commercial centre of the Low Countries, Antwerp, on August 20; and on August 22, Ghent, where the cathedral, eight churches, twenty-five monasteries and convents, ten hospitals and seven chapels were wrecked and set on fire. From there, riots spread further east and north,

reaching Amsterdam by the 23rd of August, and continuing in the far north and east until October. The outburst of rage was abruptly halted by the coming of the winter season, with its short days and long cold nights. By that time, over 400 churches had been attacked in Flanders alone. The destruction frequently involved ransacking the priest's home, and sometimes private houses suspected of sheltering church goods. There was much looting of common household goods from clergy houses and monasteries, and some street robberies of women's jewellery by the crowd. After the images were smashed and the property occupied, wrote an eye-witness, 'men fed their stomachs in a carnivalesque indulgence of beer, bread, butter and cheese, while women carted off provisions for the kitchen or bedroom'.¹

Contemporary Western society carries an uninterrupted religious succession from the medieval one. Maybe old Marx was more than ironic when he insisted that it was the 'strange God' of Capital – and not human reason – who 'perched himself side by side

with the old Gods of Europe on the altar; and one fine day threw them all overboard with a shove and a kick'.² After all, in the same decade in which England ceased burning witches, she began hanging the forgers of banknotes and the thieves of wood. Capitalism itself is a purely cultic religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed. Its moral code is stringent, although it counts only one single commandment: *you shall have no other gods before me, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me*. Its sacrificial logic is unrepentant and boundless; scapegoats and ritual victims must be ceaselessly slaughtered on the altar to appease the blind anger of the Market-god – punishing our weakness with financial plagues and monetary crisis. Its fanaticism is so complete that it refuses to be a religion among religions. Through its priestly caste, learned in the Scriptures of economic science, it proclaims itself “the simple and pragmatic Truth, the way the world works”. It is only appropriate then that the destruction of private property – as the main symbolic focus of contemporary popular rioting – appears to replace the iconoclastic fury of the past.

It is in a prophetic upsurge that Zygmunt Bauman yields us the vision of the coming *Bildesturm*: ‘Supermarkets may be, as George Ritzer famously put it, temples of worship for the members of the congregation. For the anathemised, found wanting and banished by the Church of Consumers, they are the outposts of the enemy, erected on the land of their exile. Steel gratings and blinds, CCTV cameras, security guards at the entry and hidden inside only add to the atmosphere of a battlefield and on-going hostilities. Those armed and closely watched citadels of enemy-in-our-midst serve as a day in, day out reminder of the natives’ misery, low worth, and humiliation. Defiant in their haughty and arrogant inaccessibility, they seem to shout: I dare you!’³

Pillaging and looting is therefore much more than a crime, it is an act of *profanation*. The forbidden thing, writes Agamben,

‘marked by sacredness is not simply excluded; rather it is now only accessible for certain people and according to determinate rules. In this way, it furnishes society and its ungrounded legislation with the fiction of a beginning; that which is excluded from the community is, in reality, that on which the entire life of the community is founded’.⁴

Primitive expropriation – the legal act by which the things of the world are made the exclusive possession of one – was, and continues to be, an act of consecration. It is not by chance that such expropriation plays, as explained by Marx, ‘approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race’⁵ (Marx 1990:873). In fact, it is not the construction of the fence that establishes once for all the *nomos of the earth* but rather the punishment of the first transgressors. Using the earlier metaphor, the apple is consecrated as the ‘forbidden fruit’ and Adam suffers the consequences. Consecration and profanation always present themselves at once. As soon as you put up a fence someone sneaks under it. Capital, as the Roman Empire, was founded by the punishment of the trespasser that sneaks under the fence.⁶ Not the act of tracing boundaries, but their cancellation or negation is the constitutive act of the city. Marx once said that the history of primitive accumulation ‘is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire’ (Marx 1990:875), and yet it was recounted in its essence already by Titus Livius:

Remus is said to have been the first to receive an omen: six vultures appeared to him. The augury had just been announced to Romulus when double the number appeared to him. Each was saluted as king by his own party. The one side based their claim on the priority of the appearance, the other on the number of the birds. [...] Remus contemptuously jumped over the newly raised walls and was forthwith killed by the enraged Romulus, who exclaimed, “So shall it be henceforth with every one who leaps over my walls”. Romulus thus became sole ruler; and the city was called after him, its founder (Mellor 1998:7)

"men fed their stomachs in a carnivalesque indulgence of beer, bread, butter and cheese, while women carted off provisions for the kitchen or bedroom."



With the consecration of private property, to take hold of things in the world becomes a sacred act whose performance is now only accessible through specific priestly institutions, according to determinate rules. This is why looting and pillaging has always been much more than a crime; it is a direct attack on the religious foundations of our capitalist societies. As such, the looters' logic in the 17th century, just as today, has a profound analogy with the ethics elaborated by early Franciscan communities. This is less surprising than one could think. Monks, in particular Franciscan monks, took hold of what they needed according to a notion of "lawless usage". They rejected not only the idea that one could possess personal property, a right to exclusive usage (*ius excludendi*), they also refused to collectively possess property as an order: a usage outside of legitimate possession.

When the monks were asked by Pope John XXII to justify their 'appropriations' – where 'to appropriate' is exactly the action of 'taking or making use of without authority or right' – at least according to the *ius usufructus*, that is according to a right of usage or of withdrawal, the Franciscan profanators retorted in true piratical tones 'Non, ce n'est pas un droit d'usage, c'est de l'usage sans droit'.⁸ In other words, the practice of looting is much more complex than one would initially suspect. Through theft things do not simply pass from one hand to another; they are also essentially transformed and returned to their original neutral context, often back into the hands of their creators. As such, there is a fundamental difference between an act of expropriation and an act of appropriation that corresponds to the opposition between police violence and criminal violence. An act of expropriation takes hold of the world while establishing a right to usage (*ius excludendi* or *ius usufructus*); an act of appropriation takes hold of the world and returns it to a state of "lawless usage" that radically rejects the idea of legitimate possession.

The intellectuals busy demonising the recent riots have fathers more noble than they would ever expect. In "Against the Murderous,



Thieving Hordes of Peasants", one of the finest sermons ever delivered by Martin Luther; the father of Protestantism defended the godliness of private property against the primitive conception, based on the Old Testament, for which all things were created free and common. After the commons, never again barbaric "lawless usage"! Is it Martin Luther or Boris Johnson that speaks from the columns of today newspapers? 'Our peasants want to make commons other people's properties, while they want to keep theirs. They have no respect for divine justice, nor for the sanctity of the human institutions. I think that there are no devils anymore in hell, but that all are gone in those peasants'.

To profane private property, to contemptuously jump over the newly raised wall – the act of *terminum exarare* – is the extreme sin against God. It is in this sense, as desecrater and modern-day Remus, that the 'black bloc', the looter, the destroyer of private property is the *homo sacer* of the capitalist *nomos*. The 'black bloc' is a spirit evoked at every time of disorder; a ghostly presence always discussed and never seen. It is the ultimate monster. As with all monsters it is no use to point to the fact that the 'black bloc' does not exist. Black bloc is nothing but a diffused practice aiming at the symbolic profanation of private property that is spreading like a virus

throughout Europe and beyond. It is not a clandestine organisation, nor a dissident group, nor a terrorist network. Black bloc is in other words a mode of action, not a nomadic and faceless subject endlessly roaming Europe in order to 'infiltrate peaceful protests of model citizens'. The paradox is that the non-existence of the black bloc monster does not prevent it from being a real monster, whose ceaseless invocation has very real and tangible effects. The never-ending war against its spectral presence will found and shape the new Rome: a fortress city obsessed with security and criss-crossed by the pathogenic waves of panic. To escape from this city will be impossible, because the world will have become an Omnipolis in which Interpol can reach every corner. It will be a non-place empty of hope, A living museum of the devastations caused by an uncontrollable technical progress that has its own ratio, but absolutely no human sensibility.

In the *perpetuum movens* of the future Omnipolis, kept in motion by the continuous artificial stimulation of amphetamines, energisers and anti-depressive drugs, the only flight from the hallucinatory state of speed-induced panic will be either shopping – the purchase of images, horizons of freedom, dreams of liberty – or the desperate carving out of absurd holes in the city, the sudden creations of zones of chaos in the heart of

“Our peasants want to make commons other people’s properties, while they want to keep theirs. They have no respect for divine justice, nor for the sanctity of the human institutions. I think that there are no devils anymore in hell, but that all are gone in those peasants.”

the Omnipolis, the looting of a supermarket in search of the unaffordable commodity that will finally free us from all fears. The One commodity, the Final commodity that will justify all other commodities for which we gave our time and our lives without ever receiving anything back, and that we now feel like shattering into tiny pieces to be thrown into the face of those who sold them to us, in exchange for our time. The One commodity that will never be bought nor stolen. It is possible that the 2011 London riots will be remembered as the beginning of a new regime of security and terror; a thousand-year long Crusade against the profanators, the permanent mobilisation against crime that politicians are already promising us. Or maybe the riots will be soon forgotten, a new phobic fantasy replacing the events in the never-ending spiral of panic that feeds the expanding Omnipolis.

Those who today throw themselves against an inhabitable metropolis, which recognises neither spatial nor temporal boundaries and spreads like a cancer erasing any alternative form of life, simply recognise that the city is not theirs, but is instead the burrow of a monster, pursuing its own logic. There is no doubt that the contemporary metropolis is not meant to be lived by man; it is today reduced to a standing-reserve of value that must be valorised and exploited.

But what for us is monstrous is itself craved by the monster. From the point of view of Capital the world has never been so beautiful because it has never reflected so faithfully its image. A mountain covered in litter, an ocean vomiting shit and nuclear waste are the expressions of a capitalist aesthetic for which beauty can only be equal to value. Today’s “renovation projects” are transforming the city of London into an *inhabitable desert* in which human beings exist only as workers, commuters, costumers and productive human capital. It is a city of masks in which he who has no role has no place. Only the customer, the citizen and the worker are addressed at every corner – the customer is encouraged to consume, the citizen to vote, the worker to compete with a smile. The unemployed immigrant with no money to spend has no mask: they are faceless.

It may be asked: Don’t you risk supporting the cause of the violent ones? Of the black blocs? Of those who smash shop windows and throw stones at parked cars? Far from it; it is from a position of radical pacifism that we reject all violence, because all violence serves the monster. And yet there is something truly catastrophic which is revealed by the London riots and by all the discussions about the meaning of this simple word, “violence”. On national newspapers and television shows, in

family discussions and aimless chattering in the pubs a confusion spreads like a virus to the point in which man and object, life and dead materiality become finally undistinguishable. Did we really come to the point in which a dead man and a burning car are equated under that single heading: "violence"? Must we really remind ourselves – as in a sudden shock of recognition – that there is no violence against things, but only violence against people, against life?

When a policeman shoots his bullets at a kid who dared to offend against private property, who shattered a shop window, broke a metal barricade, stole an object, he reveals the monstrous inversion of values that characterise contemporary fetishistic society. Dialectic inversion of violence under capital: since men are objects, and objects are subjects, to kill a human being now appears as a matter of duty, an act of peace; while to break an inanimate object is an unforgivable violence. The object has more value than the person: the inanimate, the dead dominates and subjugates life. It is only at this dramatic point that we can accept as a given that a guard who kills, with a cold and calculated shot, a thief who has put his hands on what remains nothing else but paper (money) may be serving peace and even that he behaved as a hero, when in fact he serves death against life, the object against man. It is not unthinkable that one day the most faithful of these guards will put an end to the human race, shooting the atom bomb against a humanity in revolt, sickened by a polluted earth each day more fit for profit, each day less fit for life.

This vision is maybe less far-fetched than we would like to think. The ideal of political protest cheered by newspapers, politicians and television shows found its model in the much acclaimed anti-war marches that accompanied every single humanitarian war of the last decade: a peaceful herd that can be caressed by the war-mongers, only to be completely ignored while fortress trains continue to supply the military bases in which flocks of flying drones are programmed – by those who every day denounce the "always

"It may be asked: Don't you risk supporting the cause of the violent ones? Of the black blocs? Of those who smash shop windows and throw stones at parked cars? Far from it"

unjustifiable" violence of the street – to drop bombs, slaughter mothers, cripple children. But they are the humanitarians and peace-operators, whilst those who throw a stone against the window of a bank are violent and probable terrorists. We are in the age of total mystification, the century of Humpty Dumpty. We have finally reached the time in which terrorists throw stones, while the paladins of peace drop bombs.

"I don't know what you mean by 'violence'", Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't — till I tell you. I meant there's a nice knock-down argument for you".

"But 'violence' doesn't mean a nice knock-down argument", Alice objected.

"When I use a word" Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less".

"The question is" said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things".

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "who is to be master - that's all".

Amedeo Policante is a writer and theorist of violence, politics and power, with more recent writings into drugs. He is based in the Politics Department of Goldsmiths, University of London.



NOTES:

1. Anonymous, as quoted in Peter J. Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: the Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 112.
2. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I (Penguin Classics, 1990), 918.
3. Zygmunt Bauman, "The London Riots – On Consumerism coming Home to Roost". *Social Europe Journal*, 9 August 2011.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105.
5. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I (Penguin Classics, 1990), 873.
6. The role played by punishment in founding and constituting the Law is one of the central concerns in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). But see also the seminal reflections by Marx, according to whom 'the criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law' in Karl Marx, *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-1863*, MECW, Vol.30: 306-318.
7. Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, (I: 7) in Ronald Mellor, *The Historians of Ancient Rome* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998); preceding quote in Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, 875.
8. 'No, this is not a lawful usage, it is a lawless usage' – passage reported in Giorgio Agamben, "Une biopolitique mineure: un entretien avec Giorgio Agamben", *Paris: Vacarme*, no. 11, 1999: 7. See also Agamben, *Profanazioni*. (Roma: Nottetempo, 2005), 90-98.

About Cordyceps.

Heart seeks a
cheaper rent.

She sighs that
she always looks
so tired these

days. Dinner
in a plastic tray.

Found pining
for the bad
husband she had
secretly resigned
herself to.

A misplaced smile, love and death in West End boozier and jokes about politicians. Drunk again, she texts me the notations to her moods. Doubtful, I pass out in a bar and awake later in the future, in some unknowable town, with expertise in delay. The confused opportunism of a burglar climbed in through the wrong window, still eager to make something of a disappointing situation.

I could never claim much of what I was, but I had a sense of purpose at least. I did this or that, they could say that of me. Those electrified glances, weird behaviour, gentle and illuminated features, disarming laughter, that sense of urgency in her manner which was always misunderstood as rudeness – quietly two are broken onto one another. I abandoned my position at the company and began to accumulate great debts carelessly, the possibility of the future either forgotten or abandoned.

The city raises concerns only for nouns and never verbs. The light outside her flat always seems to dance at all hours, in on the joke with the moths and the spindly Valerian. We go back in the night, where maps are traced on bone, where skins dance together as nervous systems momentarily fuse one, identities blurred in the musical intensity of touch. Life-stories later rewritten with a dawn laughter, sharing tea and toast on a crunchy mattress.

Unnaming names, unknowing things, so excited to see her again that I forget my words and make no sense. No matter. Took up light exercise as advised. Nearly coughed it up. Much later, she told me that nothing is more rare in a man than an act of his own – Emerson's words, the irony completely lost on me. Playing games of lovers hide-and-seek with words again, in that week of cruel paradise together.

Feeling known only when when it is given. Learn from the plants who offer indiscriminately, without hope or despair, a gift without expectation of return. People keep worrying unnecessarily. Their well-intended advice wrinkles like a dyslexic riddle. I rip up roots and disperse. A weekend by the coast, mobile phone offered to the indifference of an ocean. There's nothing to do anywhere. I come back to the city but she won't be found.

Some will attempt to hide from their own shadows, where monsters creep through children's sleep. Fuck your eyes and skin. Let me die as I have lived – but I won't let her. We get up another afternoon and it's snowing, everything messed-up again, stressed-out again. She loses her resolve. Words make her weary.

It was the mistaken separation of sex and love that killed Kafka, not his tuberculosis tales. Later again, when the true hopelessness of our situation was made clear, she held me like a cadaver, caressing with the desperate anger of a financial speculator who's gambled his last dollar on some ill-starred number. Streetlights gyrate, cars and cyclists collide. A retreat from romance to realism in every conversation, every gesture. In the ludicrous arguments and scenes staged, in the sacrifices we took pleasure in self-inflicting, lovers become the ultimate monstrosities, such aberrant actors.

Covered in bruises, neurones curl into filigree geometries and from the mind's eye issues a vivid stromata as these nerves bloom. Night subsides, moths put to sleep their schemes for meeting moons, finally we sleep easily for a change.

Dan Taylor wrote zines for a time before some nefarious stranger tricked him into abandoning print and glue for cut and paste on drownedandsaved.wordpress.com.

KINDS OF KILLING

How bad is genocide, really?



text by NICK LAND

Since 1948, defending genocide has been the surest way to ruin a dinner party. That doesn't mean, however, that the topic deserves to be immunised from controversy. There is one question in particular that merits intense and prolonged scrutiny: Is genocide really worse than killing a lot of people?

Like 'fascism' – with which it is closely connected in the popular imagination – 'genocide' is a word carrying such exorbitant emotional charge that it tends to blow the fuses of any attempt at dispassionate analysis. We can thank the political black magic of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi accomplices for that.

Prior to the Third Reich and its systematic, industrialised attempts to eradicate entire ethno-racial populations (Jews, Roma, and perhaps Slavs) along with other numerous other groups (mental and physical 'defectives' or 'useless eaters', homosexuals, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses ...) international law restricted its attention to the actions and grievances of states and individuals, with the latter subdivided into combatants and noncombatants. The National Socialist trauma changed that fundamentally.

On December 9, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (as Resolution 260), defining a new category of internationally recognised crimes as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group."

Since 1948, defending genocide has been the surest way to ruin a dinner party. That doesn't mean, however, that the topic deserves to be immunised from controversy. There is one question in particular that merits intense and prolonged scrutiny: Is genocide really worse than killing a lot of people? Posed slightly more technically: Is there a crime of genocide that stands above and beyond mass murder (of equivalent scale)? Can groups be the specific victims of crime? This is to ask whether groups exist – and have value – as anything more than a nominal or strictly formal set, whose reality is exhausted by its constituent individual members. The existence of genocide as a legal category presumes a (positive) answer to this question, and in doing so it closes down a problem of great and very general importance.

The classical liberal presumption is quite different, as summarised (a little bluntly) by the provocative remark made by British

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1987: "there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families". Harshly extrapolating from this position, a certain irony might be found in the fact that a horrified response to National Socialist crimes has taken the form of a legal codification of racial collectivism. At the very least, it is puzzling that suspicions directed at legal references to 'group rights' and 'hate crimes' among those of a libertarian bent has not been extended to the category of genocide.

In the opposite camp, the most fully articulated defence of collectives as real entities is found, as might be expected, in the foundation of sociology as an academic discipline, and more particularly in Émile Durkheim's argument for 'social facts'. Larry May's 2010 *Genocide: A Normative Account* looks back further, to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, or social being, in which human individuals are absorbed as organic parts.

Whilst the distinction of 'society' and 'individual' has colloquial (and political) meaning, those inclined to the analysis of complex systems are more likely to ask which groups or societies are real individuals, exhibiting functional or behavioural integrity, as self-reproducing wholes. In pursuing this line of investigation, it is far more relevant to discriminate between types of groups than between groups and individuals, or even wholes and parts. It is especially helpful to distinguish feature groups from unit groups.

A feature group is determined by logical classification. This might be expressed as a self-identification or sense of 'belonging', an external political or academic categorisation, or some combination of these, but the essentials remain the same in each case. Certain features of the individual are isolated and emphasised (such as genitalia, sexual orientation, skin-colour, income, or religious belief), and then employed as the leading clue in a process of formal grouping, which conforms theoretically to the mathematics of sets.

A unit group, in contrast, is defined as an assemblage, or functional whole. Its members belong to the group insofar as they

work together, even if they are entirely devoid of common identity features. Membership is decided by role, rather than traits, since one becomes part of such a group through functional involvement, rather than classification of characteristics. Social instances of such groups include primitive tribes (determined by functional unities rather than the categories of modern 'identity politics'), cities, states, and companies. The most obvious instance in socialist theory is the 'soviet' or 'danwei' work unit (whilst social classes are feature groups).

To take a non-anthropomorphic example, consider a skin cell. Its feature group is that of skin cells in general, as distinguished from nerve cells, liver cells, muscle cells, or others. Any two skin cells share the same feature group, even if they belong to different organisms, or even species, exist on different continents, and never functionally interact. The natural unit group of the same skin cell, in contrast, would be the organism it belongs to. It shares this unit group with all the other cells involved in the reproduction of that organism through time, including those (such as intestinal bacteria) of quite separate genetic lineages. Considered as a unit group member, a skin cell has greater integral connection with the non-biological tools and other 'environmental' elements involved in the life of the organism than it does with other skin cells – even perfect clones – with which it is not functionally entangled.

Clearly, both feature groups and unit groups are 'fuzzy sets', and the distinction itself – whilst theoretically precise – is empirically hazy. An urban American street gang, for instance, will in most cases be vague in its features and unity, perhaps 'ethnic' to some degree of definition, with a determinable age-range, and with ambiguous functional connections to groupings on a larger scale, or to peripheral members whose status of 'belonging' is not strictly decidable. Tattoos and other membership markings are likely to involve both identity and integrity aspects – traits and roles. Rituals of belonging (ordeals, oaths, rites of passage) are designed to disambiguate membership.

Despite such haziness, the distinction

“When a unit group is destroyed, a real individual is ‘killed’ above and beyond whatever human losses are incurred. The destruction of a feature group, in contrast, whatever the cultural loss, is not any kind of killing beyond the mass murder of human individuals.”

between these two types of groups strikes directly at the core problematic of genocide (as a legal category). When a unit group is destroyed, a real individual is ‘killed’ above and beyond whatever human losses are incurred. The destruction of a feature group, in contrast, whatever the cultural loss, is not any kind of killing beyond the mass murder of human individuals. If this is worse than murder, we should know why.

This conclusion seems relevant when weighing, for instance, the 1937 Massacre of Nanjing on the scale of historical atrocity. It suggests, at least, that an act of violence directed against a city – or integrated population unit – is no less worthy of specific legal attention than a quantitatively equivalent offence against an ethnicity, or determined population type. It seems to be no more than an accident of history that, in order to appropriate the category of genocide, massive crimes of the former variety need to be recoded as if they more properly belonged to the latter.

Complex systems ontology aside, these matters resolve ultimately into obscure social values. Orthodox conceptions of ‘genocide’ assume that ethnic identity simply and unquestionably means more than active citizenship, or participation in the life of a city. Perhaps this assumption is even arguable. But has it been argued?

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HOW TO TROLL A TROLL (2.0 STYLE....)

text and image by LUCY PEPPER

One day last year, I was happily drawing a fluffy rabbit when a blog comment arrived in my inbox. It was from a young troll. The message wasn't particularly nasty, and I have had far worse. It was from a narky little squirt with a chip on his shoulder, trying to wind me up about something I had drawn or written in my blog. He wasn't threatening me, he couldn't hurt me, he was only trying to irritate me and dent my ego for some distant sport, but I ended up shaken for the rest of the day. Why would I be so shaken by it?

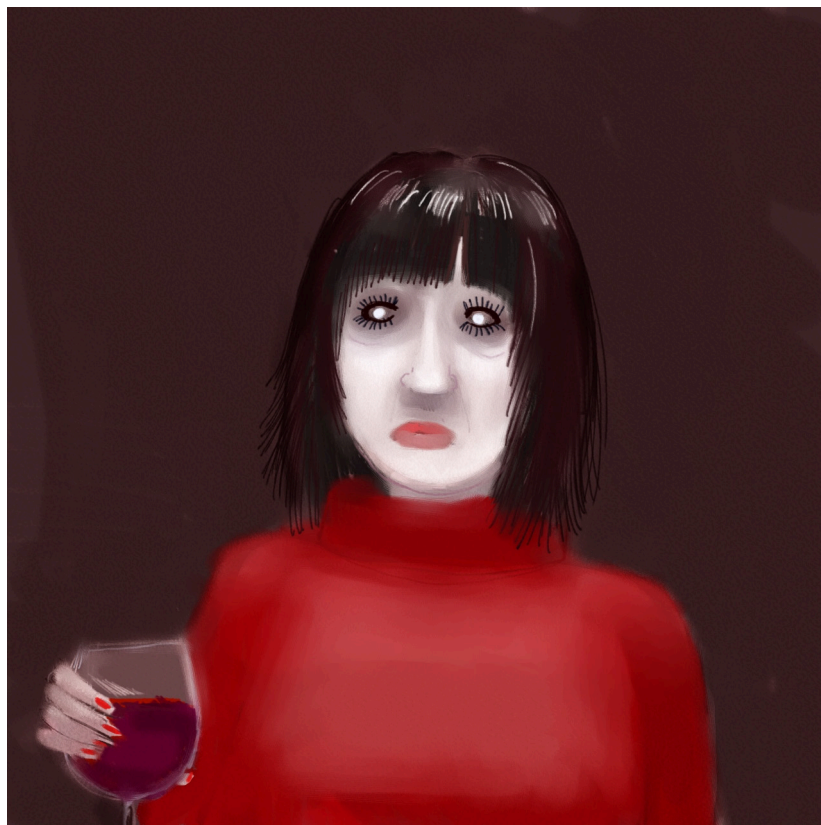
When, out of the blue, I receive a message from someone telling me that I am crap, or not funny, or just wrong and stupid, I get a real punch of adrenaline to my gut. I guess it's a fight or flight thing, as if someone has come up to me in the street (were I to be painting and writing in the street) and shouts in my face that I am shit. The adrenaline takes hours to wear off, and all the time the idea the troll has planted rolls around my head.

I used to get this kind of thing sporadically. What really bothered me was that it bothered me so much... it was partly the unexpectedness of it, but partly the fact that I couldn't pre-empt it, nor fight back. There really is no point feeding a troll. Especially a stupid one. The fight will just escalate and I will come out of the fight worse. Why? Because I am not anonymous. The troll is. The troll can say anything, so it won't be his image tarnished in the end.

It occurred to me that it would make me feel a whole lot better if I catalogued the stereotypes of trolls I had ever encountered, in blogs, forums and online newspapers etc., and I began the Troll Catalogue (trollologist.com). I'm up to #29 now. And I feel better. If I get trolled, I just laugh and add them to the list.

I've been compiling The Troll Catalogue for the last year and thousands of people have seen it and passed it round. Plenty of them have responded with recognition and relief that they aren't the only ones who get trolled and get upset by it. They have also suggested more trolls. Soon, the catalogue will be done and the trolls will have been trolled. I sometimes receive patronising messages from indignant old-school trolls to tell me that my trolls are not trolls, merely people that I don't like online. Well, things change, grandpa Troll. The net has filled up since facebook opened its doors to your Great Aunt Miriam, and twitter welcomes anyone who can type 140 characters. Now that the whole world is online, behaviour has naturally evolved, and, in turn, trolling. If the old trolls want to be pedantic about the term, then trolls are actually things that live under bridges where goats like to tread. The world contains a lot of annoying, mean idiots who want to ruin your day. Don't let them.

These are some of the trolls who have resonated a lot with people:



THE LOVE BUG.

She is struggling to find love, and as she hurtles towards her fifties, she is fuelled by rage and red wine. She 'falls' for young victims on dating sites, stalks them across the net, until she finally understands that she has been snubbed. This is her cue to fabricate a whole terrible story of love and betrayal about the victim, which she publishes anywhere and everywhere she can online.



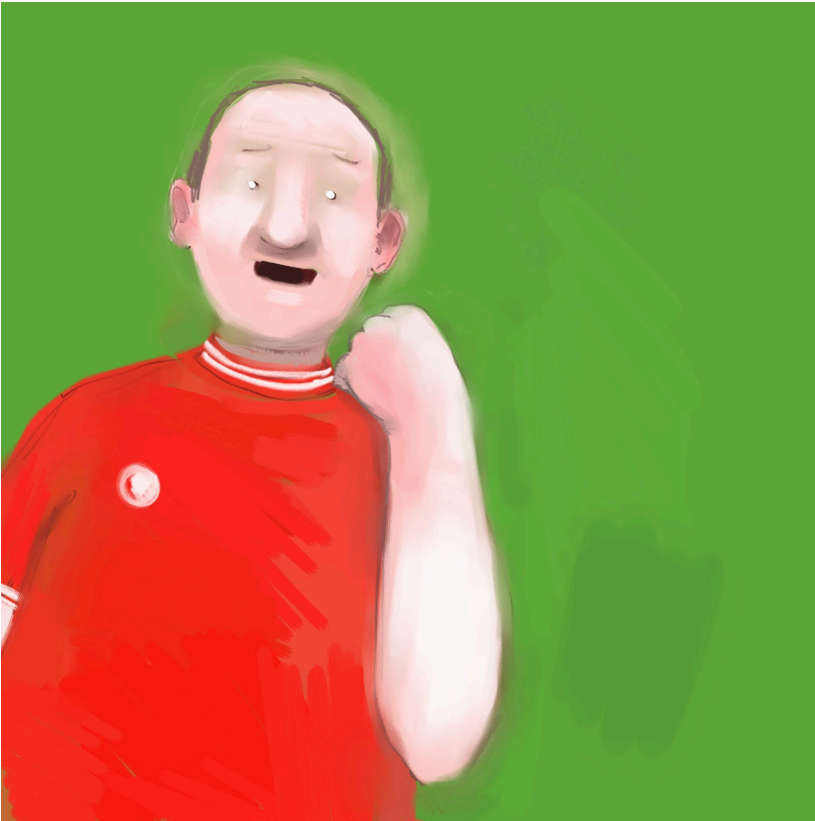
MUMMY KNOWS BEST

You will find her on the parenting websites, proselytising on organic nappies, breastfeeding and making sure your child comes out left-handed (because she is sure that is how children are supposed to be and right-handed babies are oppressed). She kicked out her 'baby-father' while she was pregnant because he ate a Big Mac in front of her.



SAGE GREEN

He is a real-ale-drinking-green-vegan-crusading-anti-fascist-naked-anti-capitalist-on-a-bicycle, and he doesn't want to be your friend. You are wrong. He is right. He is the greatest bigot of them all, but doesn't recognise it. He digs graves for a living and thinks that that is what everyone should do.



YOUR A CNUT!

The newest and stupidest kind of troll. Twitter is his natural home, for all he has to do is bash out a few (badly spelt) words and his job is done. Oddly, he is closest to the original kind of troll, just out to wind people up. His natural prey is the comedian, for whom he harbours a deep loathing and he spends his time tweeting that "@so-and-so is a cnut! you'r dog will die and your finished!"

Lucy Pepper really is the ultimate troll of trolls. Her entire troll catalogue and much else will be found on www.lucypepper.com and www.trollologist.com. Lucy@lucypepper.com.

RISING FOG...

by LARA CHOKSEY

“She had woken suddenly with a feeling that someone had just spoken. She had felt unable to breathe in the total blackness of the room, the darkness pressing down on her lungs”

[illegible]

>>>>>>>>>>>>>

A death in the family was imminent. The event crept closer, half-watched with complacency. For the younger ones, death stayed beyond the edges, an absent inevitability. For the older ones, it was a constant presence, a silent companion in the corner. For the younger ones, it was a surrendering of the flesh to nature, nothing more. For the older ones, it was the arrangement of last wishes.

The matriarch was old – older than the younger ones hoped for themselves – as old as they hoped to be, and older. Still, there was the guilt, the fear of the last words spoken, the wish for a significant farewell, a desire to perform one that they would remember. The older ones felt the tension like a gradually tightening noose, waiting for the stool to be kicked out.

Early the following morning, Alice's mother would be going away for a few days. It was the first solo trip she had taken since getting married. Alice could tell her mother was nervous as she watched her write lists and repeat herself, circling the house as she ticked off tasks. Alice was trying to be helpful, but knew she was getting in the way. She offered to find a suitcase, knowing that packing would be the very last on any list her mother made, the last thing to be done hastily and exhaustively before bed. Her offer was taken up – “One of those wheelee ones, I think they’re in the spare room” – and Alice went upstairs to find one.

It was twilight as she opened the door to the spare room. Out of the far right window, she could see the reddish sunset dying over the tops of the trees in the wood at the other end of the lawn. She went over to the far left window, and could see fog rising across the fields beyond the hedge. There was still enough light outside to see around the room, but that was not why she had not turned on the main light at the door. She never did, if she could help it, because the room somehow resisted illumination. The room suited this twilight, as if the walls and floor and ceiling had been built for this time of day between light and dark. Turning on the light, one always risked illuminating something that might otherwise remain obscured.

Alice looked through the centre window at the fat sycamore directly in front of her. Even at this time of year, its twisted limbs and full branches formed a canopy that hid the ground below. She had sat in that tree when she was younger – years ago now, reading book after book high up the trunk, once getting stuck there as a result of nothing more than a temporary fear of falling. From the tree, she could see inside the house but could not be seen, and this had made it an ideal hiding place. She used to think about the tree as the house's silent watchman, guarding the gateway to the garden and the woods beyond.

Now, looking at its full, high shape against the darkening evening, much higher than the house, Alice saw how it prevented light from coming into the room. The room faced southwest as it was, so received only the late afternoon sunlight, and this supply was further limited by the passage of the rays through the thick branches of the tree. This explained why the temperature was always slightly below that of the rest of the house; the room was in perpetual semi-darkness. Looking up at it from the garden in daylight, it was almost impossible to see in through the windows, yet Alice always found herself attempting just this on her way back towards the house after taking the dogs for a walk, trying to see something beyond the reflection of the sycamore's leaves moving in the windows.

Perhaps because of the room's limited light and colder temperature, it had been used

“It was a room of last resorts, slept in when there was nowhere else to sleep, a space which held only the material excesses of a large family”

very little over the fifteen years the family had lived there. It was indeed ‘spare’; there were other rooms that were used by guests, this one only when all other rooms and beds were occupied. Its presence was acknowledged only when absolutely necessary, and otherwise was largely ignored by the family. It was a room of last resorts, slept in when there was nowhere else to sleep, a space which held only the material excesses of a large family – suitcases, clothes hangers, piled up blankets and bits of old furniture that were too old to be of much use, yet too dear to throw away. It was a room full of things that waited to be used or else purged. Alice guessed that it had been slept in no more than twenty times over the time they had lived in the house.

That was, excepting the few long weeks she had slept here, more than a decade ago now.

The old red carpet in her own room was being taken up, the floorboards underneath sanded and varnished, the inherited flowered wallpaper covered over with neutral paint.

At first, she had been excited about having the newly decorated spare room all to herself, with its double bed, connecting bathroom, mahogany furnishings and floor-length curtains, all formerly property of the master bedroom. She had settled back against the stacked-up pillows with both bedside lamps on, reading for the sake of reading in such luxury, imagining herself as some princess in a castle. Even the act of turning off the lights either side of her was steeped in a sense of autonomous indulgence, something that grown-ups did. Twelve years old and stuck in the countryside while her friends spent their summers flirting with boys in parks, the room had felt to Alice like an escape from the boredom of fields and woods, a taste of another life.

Yet, gradually she became aware of the room’s darkness. It did not occur to her to be scared on the first two nights, but on the third night instead of turning off the lamps with satisfaction and settling into the centre of the large bed, she found herself turning them off cautiously, and considering the position in which she placed her head, leaning back into one of the corners, as if allowing room for someone else.

At some point on the second night, she had woken suddenly with a feeling that someone had just spoken. She had felt unable to breathe in the total blackness of the room, the darkness pressing down on her lungs. She was awake long enough to acknowledge this sudden strangeness, but having no real belief that anyone had spoken, had fallen back to sleep easily.

This third night, Alice lay in the darkness and willed herself to fall asleep. Her heart skipped and thudded with increasing intensity as she went over and over that brief moment the night before – had someone spoken? She became aware of how isolated the room was, situated at the far end of the house, round a corner, and wondered if anyone would hear her if she shouted out. She could not hear anything beyond the total silence of the room and the dimly audible breathing of the wind through the branches of the sycamore outside. In this total darkness, the distance between the bed and door became impassable. Even the thought of reaching out and turning on one of the lamps seemed unthinkable for fear of removing her arms, now held firmly by her sides, from under the covers.

All she could do was imagine daylight, the easy carelessness of afternoons spent running around the garden, cycling up and down the lane, wandering through the woods and paddling in the stream. Yet these imaginings only led her back to boredom, and her frustration at being trapped in the countryside for days on end, too young to make her own way to town and too old to be satisfied with the games of her still-younger siblings. Her boredom led her back to her

present paralysis, trapped in the silent darkness.

At some point during her attempts to escape that third night, the bed became a ship constructed by the thuds of her blood, the sea air made from the moving wind outside, the water rushing past the sides out of the dark stained floorboards, passing islands of wardrobes, bookcases and chests of drawers. She was floating towards the sycamore on the horizon, to be washed up on the shores of an unknown country, some silent land in which she was the only living being. And then, this prospect too terrifying, she imagined herself as part of the ship, her stiff arms the mast that held the vast sails, her legs the decks onto which water spilled, her head the spokes of the steering wheel turning. All the while, her eyes were clamped shut.

Once during that night, she had opened them against the room in an act of nervous defiance. Immediately, the ship ceased to exist. At first, she saw nothing, just the empty darkness, and again felt that she could not breathe for fear of disturbing it, and her heart pounded louder. Then, shapes started to appear in front of her eyes, moving around her head. She knew these shapes, and knew that they existed within her eyes rather than in front of them, the shapes formed as her vision tried to penetrate the dark.

Yet, perhaps there was something else, something standing somewhere on the dark floorboards that she couldn't see, waiting. Perhaps it was next to her bed. The pounding within her turned into a ringing in her ears, the pressure of her blood increasing until she thought she would burst with it.

Something in the room creaked, as if sighing, as if preparing to speak. The horror of this noise pulled her arm out from underneath the duvet and made her grasp towards one of the bedside lamps. She found the switch and, avoiding looking at the rest of the room, pressed it firmly.

In the moment that the light came on, a piece of dark lingered – a flash of a shapeless shadow disappearing in the space between the bed and the door, just beyond sight, too brief to be fully believed. Her heart gave a huge thump, and scattered once more into cantering beats.

Alice told herself that it was the light's trick, the movement of her eyes, the shock of the impact of light onto dark.

Yet, she would not move from the bed until morning. The light stayed on after that, and this was how she slept all summer, night after night, refusing to allow the darkness anywhere near her. Her mother was amused by it, as were they all – even Alice knew that it was slightly ridiculous, a girl of twelve sleeping with the lights on. She was scared of the dark, she told them unashamedly. What she could not say, what she could not explain, was that it was not only the dark that she feared, but, more than that, the moment of switching on the light, for it was this that brought the darkness towards her, this moment that made the shadows in the spare room visible.

That summer, dreams were full of half shadows and hourly awakenings. She started to stay up all night reading or watching TV, waiting for dawn so that she could sleep in the light of day. In those days, bored in the country with nothing to do, sleeping away the days seemed just as valid as filling them with activity. The summer passed, her room was finished, school started and boredom lifted. The room stayed spare, rarely entered, waiting.

Alice came in to look for a suitcase, and was standing at the window in the dwindling light. She turned towards the room again as unobtrusively as she could, widening her eyes as she checked the shadows of branches pushing against the walls. Despite more than ten years passing she still was unnerved by this room. Over the years, she had realised that in their own ways they were all unnerved by it. Her father protested that it just needed better lighting, her mother that all her favourite furniture was in it and how could she not like it? However, the younger ones all agreed that it had nothing to do with the lighting of the room or the objects within it. There was something wholly foreign about the room, as if by crossing over the threshold one was crossing over the border of another country. It lay forgotten in the corner of the house, an annexed piece

of no-man's land, and Alice was only reminded of it in moments of necessity.

She picked up one of the wheelee suitcases that sat beside the wardrobe. The suitcase felt heavy, and something rolled within it. Thinking that there might be another case within this one, following her mother's habit of stacking things within things so as to conserve space, she carried the suitcase over to the bed and laid it on top of the piled up blankets. She started to unzip the top of it, and while doing so sensed some sort of movement near the windows. She looked up quickly, and realised that it was her own reflection in the centre window, illuminated by the fast-fading twilight. Her heart beating a little more quickly, she turned back to the suitcase.

Then, as if it might have changed, she looked back at her reflection, set against the dark leaves of the sycamore outside, and felt for a moment that she was not really looking at her reflection at all. What if, she wondered, what she saw was not a reflection, but part of the room itself? What if the room carried on outside the windows? What if what she saw in the windows was real? What else would be real? In that moment, she felt that she only saw part of the room, and that its dimensions extended far beyond that which she perceived.

She felt totally exposed, as if she were surrounded by all manner of things without her knowledge. She felt unsteady, as if floating, as if the floorboards were rising and she was sinking through them and beyond them, weightless and shattered into tiny parts. Turning back to the suitcase, she unzipped the rest of it, and opened the lid.

As the lid fell back onto the blankets on the bed, the bathroom door slammed. She jumped as she quickly turned her head; there was nothing there.

There must be a breeze, she thought, turning to the windows, and saw that the top half of the window directly facing the sycamore was slightly ajar. Her mother must have left it open to air the room and forgotten, but Alice could not remember it being open before.

She went over to close it, pushing it up and sliding the catch into place. Twilight was nearly over; the sky above the trees in the woods a dimming grey-yellow, the fog nearly indistinguishable from the darkness. She turned quickly back to the bed, half expecting to see someone standing behind her. There was no one, and she went back to the suitcase.

Inside it, there lay a small drawstring bag made of soft cotton. It looked like a wash bag. Alice picked it up. It was heavy, and she imagined that there were bottles and creams inside from some prior trip. She thought that perhaps it might be useful for her mother; so replaced it inside the suitcase without looking to see what was in it. She would look when she had taken the suitcase to the master bedroom. She did not want to open anything else at the risk of prompting another door to slam, or witnessing a foreign moving reflection.

Outside, the fog floated into dark.

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WHEREAS, It has become apparent to the citizens of San Francisco that there is no security for life and property, either under the regulations of society as it at present exists, or under the law as now administered; therefore, the citizens whose names are hereunto attached to unite themselves into an association for the maintenance of the peace and good order of society, and the preservation of the lives and property of the citizens of San Francisco, and do bind ourselves each unto the other, to do and perform every lawful act for the maintenance of law and order, and to sustain the laws when faithfully and properly administered; but we are determined that no thief, burglar, incendiary or assassin shall escape punishment, either by the quibbles of the law, the insecurity of prisons, the carelessness or corruption of the police, or the laxity of those who pretend to administer justice.

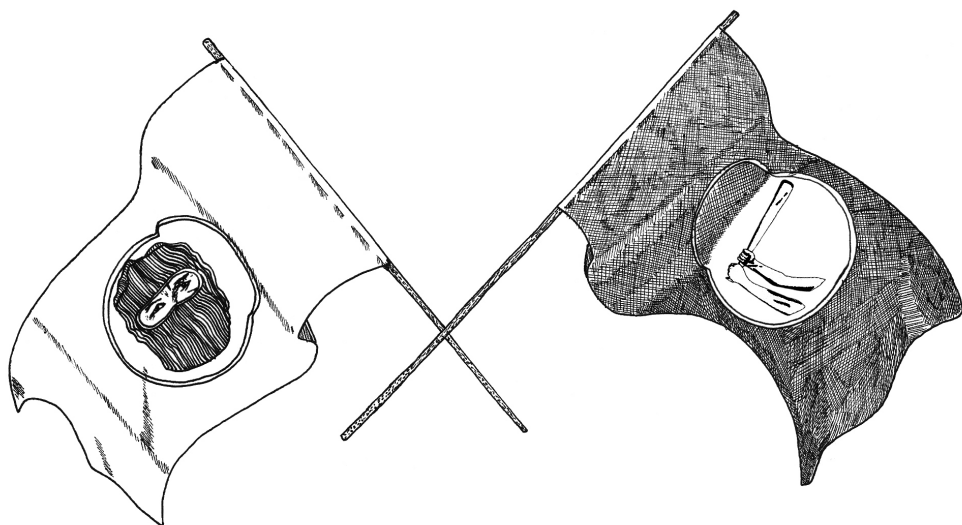
– Document of the constitution of the “Committee of Vigilance”, San Francisco, 9 June 1851

by YARI LANCI

Not so long ago, as a calm and dutiful tourist, I visited Leeds Art Gallery. A white sculpture drew my attention. It depicted a female angel, looking oddly at one of her ankles which was raised from the floor. The angel seemed quite indifferent to anything but her white left ankle. Neither God nor mere humans seemed to bother her at all. The room with the statue did not have security guards present in that moment, and I was alone with other visitors. Although aware of the typically English regime of constant and all-pervading regulations regarding things one can or cannot do, the unconscious tendency to breach them prevailed when the opportunity to take a sneaky photograph presented itself. I did not even have the time to frame the sculpture in the viewfinder before one of the other visitors of the gallery quite harshly whispered to me:

“the use of cameras is forbidden in galleries and museums, don't you know?”

Notwithstanding the fact that technically she was right, for there were signs everywhere reading “no pictures allowed”, I started wondering why I was not scolded by a security guard but instead by an ordinary visitor who evidently had not been hypnotised enough by the pieces of art in the room. What brings someone, as an ordinary citizen, to tell another ordinary citizen what should not be done? What is the threshold of intensity that has to be overcome in order to personify this odd version of a vigilante figure? The art gallery example can be easily combined with what occasionally happens on public transport, when someone who tries to travel without a ticket is promptly chastised by ‘regular’ passengers for not paying the fare. These two examples are



The Double Flow of Vigilantism.

illustration by Peter Willis

evidently not characterised, one always hopes, by the use – or threat of – physical force. Yet, they seem to be smothered versions of a potentially dangerous phenomenon.

Historically, every attempt to crystallise the model of a perfect functioning society, both in the realm of theory (political philosophy) and in practical reproductions (legal theory), often assumed the existence of agents that acted on the decisions of the 'sovereign law', in order to defend the established political order: Guardians, *custodes*, watchmen, guards, army, police and so on are only some of the examples of the multifarious extensions of socio-politico-legal systems imagined by theorists like Plato, More, Campanella, Hobbes, Machiavelli – just to mention some of the most famous. These agents would be the political actors mediating the relation between the ideal construction (and safeguarding) of the imagined society and the actual manifestation of this in a community of subjects. These cases of spontaneous manifestation of generalised control in relation to a determined set of regulations force the question: when did we ourselves start replacing the endorsed branches of the Leviathan? When did we become vigilantes? And more importantly, are the art gallery and public transport episodes examples of a renewed civic-mindedness and responsibility for common spaces, or simply manifestations of something deeply rooted in our society and micro-physically dispersed? This is not to express an ethical judgement regarding the established order, but rather to provide an approach to the category of vigilantism.

In the composition of a bestiary of contemporary capitalism, the figure of the vigilante should be given particular attention. The excerpt from the manifesto of the Vigilance Committee, quoted at the beginning of this article, shows quite clearly how vigilantism was born as a response to the 'quibbles of the law' to protect the private property of the citizens of San Francisco. The link between the establishment of parameters regarding what constitutes a crime and the development of private property has already been detected by many as one of the main characteristics of

liberal capitalism.

Vigilantism might be identified as 'any form of violent self-help in the face of crime' (Abrahams 1998: 110). The expression 'self-help' should here be understood as independent or 'autonomous' (Johnston 1996) from state institutions to defend the established order or to prevent illegal and criminal acts. In addition, Rosenbaum and Sederberg highlight the conservative core of the practice of vigilantism, which they define as an 'establishment violence' that aims at safeguarding the status quo of a society.¹ Yet attempts to define the concept of vigilantism converge towards the paradoxical position of a crime control which itself has the potential to become criminal.

In this way vigilantism becomes a sub-category of political violence. Thinkers like Weber, Schmitt, and Benjamin each understood that the real problem and inevitable paradoxes arise when the state loses its monopoly on violence. Why would a determined socio-legal order want to outlaw a phenomenon that, in accord with a regime of establishment violence – what Benjamin called 'law-preserving violence' – helps, if anything, the state's maintenance of formal legal boundaries? Yet Weber defines the political state in the use or implied threat of its own physical force (Weber 1991: 77-8). Therefore rather than reinstating establishment violence, these independent extra-legal agents in fact threaten the legitimacy and continuity of the political state through their potential use of force-acts – a conclusion Schmitt also makes in his *The Concept of the Political* [1927].²

This is exemplified in the response that emerged days after the August 2011 riots across London and other English cities. On August 9th, two hundred men took to the streets of Eltham to defend their local neighbourhood, shops, and businesses from rioters. They were chanting in support of the English Defence League: "we're doing the job of the police", claimed one of them to a Guardian journalist. Soon however this attempt at self-defence against criminal acts was promptly interrupted by a police contingent that, framing their intervention as the protection of civilians

from rioters, announced the restoration of the state's monopoly on violence. Benjamin argued that in controlling the degree of violence that can be employed, the law is not so much concerned with the preservation of legal ends, but rather with 'the intention of preserving the law itself; [...] violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law' (Benjamin 2004a: 239). In other words, it is the 'mere existence of violence outside the law that constitutes a threat' (Newman 2004: 571). It is in this sense that Benjamin (2004b: 232) had previously stated that 'the law's concern with justice is only apparent, whereas in truth the law is concerned with self-preservation.' Vigilantism threatens the law with its use of violent means outside the legal framework, hence why, historically, law often tended to forbid private initiatives against criminal (actual or alleged) behaviours. Vigilantism works as an overproduction of antibodies that the organism must repress in order to not lose its hierarchical chain of command for the protection of the living body.

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What happened in Norway in July 2011 is symptomatic of the kind of vigilantism that is performed at the individual level, but that reaches a macro-political scale in its threat against a determined set of beliefs or vision of political ideas. Whilst the media were unjustifiably crying over the foreseen and expected death of Amy Winehouse, Anders Breivik killed some ninety people in Oslo in two different violent actions. The author of these attacks had already started his vigilante crusade against multiculturalism, Muslims, left-wing and liberal thinking in a 1500-page manifesto and few videos circulating on YouTube. Even though Breivik proclaimed that his actions were necessary for a 'better world' – a variation of many other classical tropes aiming at the greater good, to protect society, or the maintenance of the peace and good order of society – the state's monopoly on violence reacted to eradicate the danger embedded in any private use of violence not

advocated by its only 'legitimate' source of emission.

The behaviour of the police, unsurprisingly forbidding any act of vigilantism, is only one side of the framework this article is trying to establish, and we shall get back to it later.

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Comic books provide a different perspective on the theme of vigilantism through the genre of the superhero narrative. As is well known, superheroes are fictional masked characters, usually equipped with superpowers, whose aims are to protect the society in which they live. In other words, where the customary police and army cannot accomplish a certain degree of security, superheroes come into play.

The 'revisionary superhero narrative' (Klock 2002) gives us an appropriate model for the investigation of vigilantism. Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* [1986] and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* [1986-7] were the first two manifestations of a superhero narrative which problematised the concept of vigilantism in the second half of the 1980s. These two graphic novels significantly reworked the tropes of the superhero narrative, demonstrating how vigilantism always gravitates around a never clear-cut normative regime of inside/outside or, more specifically, around the flowing movement of the constantly shifting line which marks the boundaries of legality and illegality. For example, in Moore's *Watchmen* the Keene Act (an emergency bill passed by senator Keene) outlaws any kind of private vigilantism, and states that costumed vigilantes must regularly register with their real names.³ The position of the superhero/vigilante is remarkably different to those other superheroes belonging to the Golden or Silver Ages of comic book history (such as Superman, Captain America, Green Lantern and so on).

In the fictional world of *Watchmen*, vigilantes are consequence and product of their own cultural, political, and historical framework. Costumed heroes start to dress up to fight crime because they are inspired by

fictional stories in pulp magazines and comic books present on the market, in the revisionary (meta-)fictional world created by Alan Moore. Following Althusser's definition of ideology as 'the controlling force of the State' and his distinctions of State Apparatuses, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), Hughes argues that Moore's vigilantes are 'completely caught up in ideology' (Hughes 2006: 546). The authors of classical superhero narratives would put their characters, and their ideal representation of champions of justice and perfection, *outside* any of Althusser's categories of State Apparatuses. Conversely, the phenomenon of vigilantism in *Watchmen* emerges from reasons connected, in some way or another, to the overarching ideological superstructure, whilst in previous comic books, superheroes can be considered outside any category of state apparatuses when observed in relation to their fictional political framework. The ideal of justice and perfection these old superhero narratives promoted was an ideological extension of the real world from which the comic books were created, covertly arguing for the protection of the American status quo as the only superpower. In a time when the US was first facing the Great Depression, then World War II, superheroes comics functioned as an addendum of the ruling ideology of power.

What of the Soviet Union's 'superheroes' then, one might ask. Paik locates in Boris Groys's *The Total Art of Stalinism* a resemblance between the ideological core of Stalinist avant-garde art and American superhero narratives of the Golden and Silver Ages of comic books. Paik shows how one of the most interesting aspects of Groys's study of socialist realism was the 'characterization of Stalin as a demiurgic sovereign who achieves a consummate unity of aesthetic theory and political practice in his leadership over the revolutionary state' (Paik 2010: 16-7). In fact, Groys describes how avant-garde art, once its aesthetic world-making ambitions had been incorporated by the Party, begun to use Stalin's demiurgic traits as the main theme of artworks 'that would depict and unfold in a social reality transformed by revolutionary willpower'. Furthermore, the

transcendent and superhuman qualities of these Soviet 'superheroes' described by Groys strikingly resemble the narrative convention of the American superhero comics: exemplified in the Manichean distinction between the transcendental "positive hero" of Bolshevism and the counterrevolutionary "wrecker". Similarly, a clever and more up-to-date version of a Soviet superhero narrative can be found in Mark Millar's *Red Son* [2003]. In his graphic novel, Millar provides an interesting version of the Superman narrative and describes what would have happened if Superman's rocket ship landed in the Soviet Republic instead of Texas.

These different examples of superhero vigilantism tend towards a macro-political management of what, in diverse ways, can be considered as a crime against the status quo. The internationalisation of vigilantism provided by US military invasions over the last fifty years exposes a tendency towards an independent violent action – regardless of prescriptions of international political associations – perpetrated autonomously and on a globalised scale. This macro-political vigilantism is illustrated by the graphic novels discussed earlier in two distinct forms. On the one hand, Miller's *Batman* depicts the struggle between an independent vigilante and his relation with the politico-legal framework he has to deal with while fighting urban crime; on the other, Moore's *Watchmen* demonstrates what happens when political power decides to employ vigilantes they can control (Dr. Manhattan and The Comedian), while outlawing others who are determined not to be subordinate to a 'masked vigilantes registration act' (Rorschach). In *Watchmen* Moore sets a line of flight in the figure of Adrian Veidt/Ozymandias that, from the intention of saving the world from nuclear holocaust, inevitably leads to the slaughter of millions of people for the 'greater good'. Even in comic books, the rationalisation of the biopolitical necessary sacrifice is already linked to the phenomenon of vigilantism. Žižek's investigation about 'who pushes the button?' (Žižek 2008) seems to be particularly relevant in Moore's text.

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This internationalisation of vigilantism – and the state's actions to prevent the loss of monopoly on violence – is today accompanied by the introjection of micro-political vigilantism. In fact, this is the monstrous metamorphosis that completes the second part of the framework of this phenomenon.

This second flow is frequently encouraged by the same legal-political agents that, as we have already seen, should provide the protection of being the only source of sanctioned violence. From the public encouragement of anonymous witness reports, or the recent incarceration of youths for inciting without enacting criminal acts,⁴ to courses for the preparation and training of neighbourhood patrols, these groups now enjoy full police collaboration and support (Abrahams 1998: 116). Foucault teaches us how the liberal (and neoliberal) political rationality wields both *laissez-faire* and coercive power simultaneously within a framework of precise and rationalised calculation. To a certain extent, then, vigilantism becomes a diagram that inscribes itself in Deleuze's description of the contemporary society of control. The diagram of vigilantism is not related to an environment of enclosure – as in Foucault's descriptions of disciplinary regimes of power – but appears to be dispersed throughout the entire civil society and also employed for utilitarian reasons. The utilitarian and productive use of civilians' vigilantism is the second flow of a phenomenon which, unrestrained, might become lethal.

The danger of this second form of vigilantism – its becoming-monstrous – stems from its universalisation, at the microphysical (and micro-political) level, and its internalisation at the level of personal conducts. One possible outcome of this tendency is a thoroughly disciplined society where, paradoxically, any form of control (both in the form of legal forces and civilians' vigilantism) is redundant. However we might discount this, as it is impossible to achieve a thorough all-encompassing control that, consequently, would make such control

redundant. A second possible outcome could be a society where everyone would watch, vigilate, and monitor everyone else, and the possibility of any agency would disappear in an odd game of guessing, prevention, and anticipation of other people's possible intentions. This neurotic pattern can only lead to a total and absolute paralysis.

If Bentham's panopticon was a model of generalised control from a single point of observation, and Deleuze's society of control a model of invisibility of diversified particles of security, the society of vigilantism would appear at the conjunction, the extension, and extremity of the two preceding diagrams, where vigilante conduct is not only dispersed and universal, but also visible. As well as discipline and security, vigilantism is transient and in constant metamorphosis. In addition to that, if in Deleuze and Guattari our society is described as an organism affected by the cancerous schizophrenic cells of capitalism, and Bataille would outline the different excesses of our times as the measure of the growth of our system, we might as well say that vigilantism is one of these monstrous groups of cell which is, once introjected at the level of personal conducts, destined to proliferate and annihilate.

Ultimately, political power – whichever form it might take, whether in sovereign law, disciplinary power, or securitised neoliberal control – does not encourage violent vigilantism. The monopoly on violence is a political tool that the state must protect ferociously. However, contemporary western governments are boosting a type of vigilantism that is intended to be working in the form of a security mechanism (or *dispositif*), where every manifestation of the phenomenon is part of a broader process of calculated rationalisation.

The flow of vigilantism is constituted by a double and simultaneous movement of expansion-internationalisation of vigilantism of the US and the ideological project of Breivik, and contraction-internalisation at the level of individual conduct via the constant encouragement of practices of non-violent vigilantism. The aforementioned comic books trace the red line following the evolution and mutation of this phenomenon. Their "fire

alarm" remains painfully loud.

At the beginning of his most famous work Nietzsche uses his Zarathustra to narrate the metamorphosis of the human spirit, of 'how the spirit shall become a camel, and the camel a lion, and the lion at last a child' (Nietzsche 1969: 56). The 'sacred Yes' and the creation of new values of Nietzsche's child is still very far from our days. After being a camel who is able to accept his burden (discipline), and possibly becoming a lion who attempts to fight the dragon called 'thou shalt!' (security/control), we are on the path of turning into perceptive and incredibly responsive (in-)dividual vigilantes.

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ENDNOTES

1. Alternatively, Johnston redefines vigilantism beyond establishment violence or legal definitions, and 'makes no assumption that vigilante action is necessarily illegal or extra-legal ... illegal and extra-legal actions are not ... preconditions of vigilantism' (Johnston 1996: 232-3).
2. The basis of Schmitt's argument is the assumption that only the state can decide who the enemy is. This decision presupposes the final possibility of using physical force (and ultimately, war) against the enemy. It goes without saying that Schmitt would argue that vigilantism is possibly one of the most dangerous forces that might undermine the political character of the state and, consequently, its legitimacy and continuity. The danger would be directly implied through the declaration – and therefore the ultimate assumption of the use of physical force – of the category of the enemy. Both Weber and Schmitt give the impression of having absorbed, and reused in a modified updated version, Hobbes's political theory from the *Leviathan*. In fact, in Hobbes's work, the primary steps towards a safe and 'peaceful' Commonwealth were firstly the renunciation of individual violence of the subject, and consequently the justification of violence perpetrated by the sovereign-Leviathan.
3. In the last thirty years superhero narratives frequently employed a 'registration act' as Moore does with the Keene Act in *Watchmen*. Another very interesting example of a registration act can be found in Mark Millar's *Civil War* [2006-7], where the "Superhuman Registration Act" is the main plot point from which the story unfolds. The registration act in superhero narratives is a narrative device which forces the story to show the inadequacies and paradoxes created by the existence of vigilantism.
4. "Report suspect behaviour" signs on public transport, and the incarceration of two young men for drunkenly organising a riot in Northwich in August 2011 which never took place, are examples that highlight the constant tendency towards total pre-emption that characterises contemporary internalised vigilantism.

Zombie

*We erected at midnight.
Hungry and all messed up.
Skin peeling, limbs falling off, no blood.*

*First it was me, then old William, veteran Charlie and others.
Clothing torn, shattered, soiled.
We looked like bums and lepers wrapped up rags, but we were an army.
Platoon with no mission.*

*We set our minds on eating people.
Robbing them of their precious bodies and souls.
I didn't want to go.
Why would I if Burger King was just around the corner?
But there was this damn peer pressure.*

*We were ready to deploy.
Slowly but persistently, towards the city centre.
And then I saw You.
Rising through mud in your little white dress,
Dirty and wild.*

*Your dead eyes gleaming in the moon light.
Your mindless howl, passionate and heart throbbing.
Your stiff movements reminded me of the tango.
Shall we dance my dear?
Will you spend this night with me?*

*And if I could feel, it would be love.
I wanted to go on long, slow walks down the cemetery.
Just the two of us.*

Mine.

*Lay still in the fields, like a murdered couple.
Just the two of us.
Share a coffin on those sunny lazy days.
Just the two of us.*

*But you were consumed by rage.
Driven by famine and hatred.
You couldn't feed on love.
Tranquillity died with your heart.*

You led with a horrifying roar.

*Shambling in the front line.
You didn't feel fear, nor were able to.
The anger blinded you.*

*I was trying to warn you, but I couldn't speak.
Your head was blasted, split in half.
Thy lips tasted the shotgun in a one-way kiss.
Pathetic gas attendant didn't hesitate.
You were too slow.
All of us were.*

I devoured your flesh after you fell.

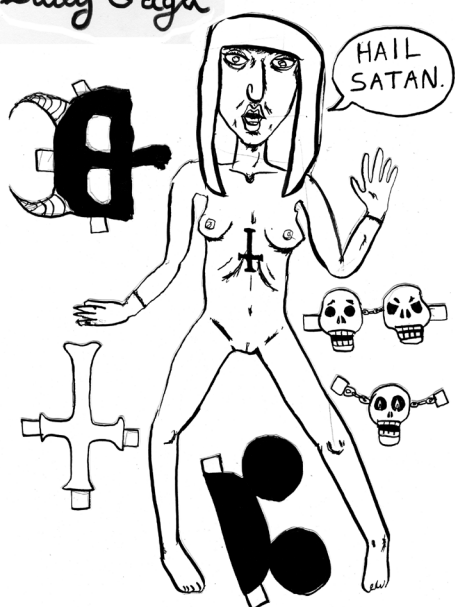
Marcin Kolodziejczyk is a writer who, despite great internal struggle, still holds a naïve faith in humanity and its virtues. De gustibus non est disputandum.

Beyoncé



PHOTOCOPY THE PAGES AND
CUT OUT THE FIGURES
AND THEIR CLOTHES. FOLD
THE TABS ON THE CLOTHES
TO FIX THEM ON. TRACE AROUND
THE FIGURES AND CREATE NEW DESIGNS!

Lady Gaga



RIHANNA

Nuala Murphy is an illustrator and writer with a disquieting record of work on womanhood and femininity, *Bloody Sunday*, as well as a cult *Contagious* comic. nualacmurphy.blogspot.com // nualacmurphy@yahoo.co.uk.













MYTEXT

It was a foregone conclusion. Her birthday fell on a Sunday – post can only arrive at best a day early or a day late. Best to have it early, I thought. A modest card, a sentiment or two, a chocolate coin and a leaf from the plant she had bought me.

"If the postman hasn't stolen it, you should find in this card two leaves from my money plant, one of which turned into a chocolate coin."

If the postman hasn't stolen it.

Oh, cruel hand of fate you taunt me so. It comes back to me now as a game of chess meticulously planned, the gods chuckling as I come to the table claiming "I'm going to win this one." For they knew, this birthday was destined to fall now, and because I *happened* to use this particular postbox, and because one particular Royal Mail employee *happened* to pick up the post that day, or sort that post that day, or deliver the post that day, that coin's fate was assured.

It never arrived.

Somewhat vexed, I was compelled to search for an explanation. In the true spirit of our time, I delved into the internet to find a customer service section over which a figure named Sarah presided. "Ask Sarah a question," it said, with a small box in which to write.

So I asked Sarah.

Sarah had battled well – she had deflected my queries and blunted my weapons. My human provocation was nothing when met by her steeled sentence recognition programme. But she was a mere pawn, I could tell, a machine on guard. Of course she didn't know these things, what would I expect? Her purpose was to deflect. She said, "Stop now, traveller; fore it be too late. You may not like what you find." But I was not to be deterred. Beyond I ventured, towards someone with a brain.

To 'Contact Us,' that sometimes allusive link in the corner of all websites. I was led through a maze of corridors, towards forms and away again, back to Sarah narrowly missing another battle, and finally to the Post Office Customer Service website.

Karen, from the special branch of the Royal Mail, had no responsibility here, no accountability whatsoever, despite the fact that it was in one of her shops that the card was posted. The Post Office, separated from the Royal Mail in the 1980s, now relies on government subsidies to ensure it makes a profit.¹ The PFI-contracted software system which increases automation also increases financial discrepancies, resulting in sub-postmasters being arrested for fraud.²

I never heard from Karen again. Our fleeting romance was over. Back to the Royal Mail website I went, to 'get in touch,' as they put it.

I was being pummelled by language. *Sorry, very sorry, really sorry, customers, seriously, issues, assurances, improvements, appropriate action, additional information and evidence.* Almost every word carries with it the absolute necessity of reinforcing my role as a 'customer with expectations,' buffered with pseudo-casual terms like 'get in touch' to heighten the personable experience I should be having. I had wielded my pen-sword in an impudent attempt to break from this condition, and I was being reprimanded. *Pursue us only if you have the correct paperwork.* Mark! Susan! Edwen! Take my hand and renounce this affliction!

But they seemed to be lost within a greater organism, with mouths that read from codes of practice and ears that did not hear.

To the paperwork I reluctantly went: to bad handwriting and envelopes, to estimates of the cost of the article. Months passed. Spring became summer; the remaining chocolate coins slowly began to melt. Until one day, I heard about Moya Greene.

Moya is a Canadian businesswoman. She was behind the privatisation of Canadian National Railway and the deregulation of the airline industry. She also 'modernised' Canada Post, with a strong emphasis on automation. She came out of it with lower revenues, higher profits, injuries up 15.4% and grievances up 59.3%.³ But higher profits, hey! Royal Mail lapped her up, and she's now their CEO just as the Government push through plans to privatise the service,⁴ with the biggest concern being whether the Queen's head will remain on a stamp. Yes, reader; another large employer automating its service in the name of profits, with the Government making up the cash when revenues fall short, to make sure Moya gets her £500,000-ish salary.⁵

Dear Moya,

Since March I have been in correspondence with the Royal Mail. However, I have actually been in correspondence with an automated response system. As a result I have not got anywhere near resolving the issue I initially had. In March I sent a card through the post and the chocolate coin I had enclosed was stolen. The responses I have had have been empty gestures, often apologising for things which had not happened - 'I'm sorry to hear that Recorded Signed-For mail you sent, took ten days to be delivered,' for example.

As a result, my initial concern has been inflated and this correspondence has left me frustrated. Being apologised to by a machine is a simple deferral of responsibility and leaves one unfulfilled, even provoked to strive for a real apology and / or explanation. I thus filled in and sent a P58 in

April, to which I have received no reply.

It is increasingly a systemic feature of business-oriented organisations to generate an appearance of a conscientious company providing a valuable service. This appearance is increasingly proving itself to be a hollow manifestation of a wholly different beast as the service becomes more expensive, for customers and taxpayers, staff are made redundant in what is called 'modernisation,' and chocolate coins go missing with no attempt at an explanation as to why this could be. Is there no way back from this increasingly ingrained bureaucracy? Exasperated, I contact you, the head of the Royal Mail, to get your thoughts. I hope to hear from you soon.

Regards,

Adam Hutchings.

Once the initial uncontrollable glee had surpassed following receipt of the stamps, and I settled down into the banality that was my everyday engagement with the world, the cruel reality of the situation dawned on me with a new clarity. These stamps were merely a physical manifestation of the language that had previously been used to keep me at a distance. I had been duped by gifts, apologies and assurances. All along, it had not been the machines that were guarding the Royal Mail from my relentless attacks, like deflecting shields, not susceptible to pain; it had been that which runs through their wires, their coding — the language of PR. And it was not confined to programmed robots. So effective was it shown to be that everyone had become contaminated. The humans no longer knew what they were, just as machines lack self-consciousness. Machines, cyborgs, people — an increasingly ambiguous set of distinctions in the Royal Mail.

But this virus had not spawned from within this organisation. It can be found elsewhere, everywhere, in endless electronic correspondences and face-to-face interactions with shop staff, on non-stop news channels and viral marketing strategies, in corporate social responsibility and sponsored educational initiatives. Moya Greene had receded back into her cave, her henchmen at the entrance, but I, having never found an answer as to the whereabouts of a small chocolate coin, now had a new quest before me.

THE REPLIES

If you sent an item that hasn't arrived at its destination, you can submit a claim for compensation.

Safeplace™ enables the recipients of mail to nominate a safe place for us to deliver their items to when goods are ordered over the phone or via the Internet. It's currently only available in

conjunction with Royal Mail Tracked™.

Thank you for your email.

As all enquiries and complaints concerning the delivery of mail items are handled by Royal Mail and not by Post Office counters, please use this link to contact Royal Mail's customer service via their website.

www.royalmail.com/contactus

If for any reason this route is unavailable, use www.royalmail.com and select 'Contact us' from the bottom left of the webpage and then click on [Send Royal Mail Customer Services an email](#)

If you need any further help with Post Office® products and services, you can call 0845 722 33 44 between 8.15 am and 6 pm Monday to Friday, and 8.30 am to 2.00 pm on Saturday. You can also access information at www.postoffice.co.uk, the official Post Office® website.

Kind Regards

Karen Beveridge

Customer Service Advisor.

Thank you for your e-mail - this has been allocated to one of our advisors who will investigate and respond to your specific enquiry. Our aim is to reply to all customer emails within five working days.

Thank you for contacting Royal Mail.

Dear Mr H

Thank you for your further contact with Royal Mail.

I am sorry to hear that you are disappointed with the response you received from us about your complaint.

I would like to assure you that we take these matters very seriously. However to be able to make any useful enquires we need additional information such as posting dates and times, where the items were posted and how, and which services were used. Our 'Lost, damaged or delayed inland mail - claims form' (also known as a P58) list all these details needed.

With this information we are able to check for any known problems which may have occurred along the journey the letter should have followed. Without this information all we do is ask the Delivery Office to take more care. As it is possible that your items may not have reached the Delivery Office this will have a limited effect resolving the problem.

Additionally if we are unable to locate the items the details provided on the P58 form will enable us to process claims for compensation.

Thank you for contacting me about this matter and I am sorry that I could not send you a more favourable reply. Please accept my apologies once again and if I can be of any more help, please let me know.

With regards
Susan Eylott
Customer Services Advisor

Dear Customer

Thank you for contacting Royal Mail.

I'm sorry to hear that Recorded Signed-For mail you sent, took ten days to be delivered.

Of the huge volumes of letters and packets we handle, very few encounter a problem along their way - but we take every single failure seriously, so I'm really sorry that you have had cause to contact us.

We aim to deliver First class mail on the working day after we collect it, and Second class mail by the third working day after we collect it. These are known as 'due dates'. I must stress that these are the dates we aim for and are not guaranteed. Due to the millions of pieces of mail that pass through our massive postal pipeline each day, we cannot trace individual items unless the Special Delivery service has been used.

For this reason, we compensate a customer for loss: the option of searching for a non-tracked product is not something we can offer. In order for us to process your request as quickly as possible, it's essential that you complete the P58 form fully, enclosing all supporting documentation as requested.

Once again, please accept my sincere apologies on behalf of Royal Mail for the problem you've had, and our thanks for taking the time to make us aware of this. Please be assured that we take letting our customers down seriously and will use this information to make further improvements.

Regards

Edwen Jones
Customer Service Advisor

Dear Mr Hutchings,

I am sorry to hear that you have had problems with an item that was delivered minus the contents, a chocolate coin, and the responses that you have received from Customer Services. I will be asking my team to look into this as a matter of urgency and they will get back to you very shortly.

Sincerely

Moya Greene
Chief Executive Officer

Dear Mr Hutchings

Thank you for your email of 2nd July 2011 about your complaint about the responses you have received from Customer Services, and your item that was delivered without the chocolate coin. Moya has asked me to look into this and reply.

Please would you be so kind to provide me with your address, and the contact details you used to contact our Customer Services Team so that I can make further enquires on your behalf.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Terri

Terri Wilders
Chairman & Chief Executive Office

Dear Mr Hutchings

Many thanks for coming back to me. I have just checked our records with your address and I have found the information from the online team. However I can not locate your claim form. Do you still have a copy, if so please can you either scan a copy to me or send me a hard copy in the post to the below address. Please can you ensure that you do attach all the relevant information requested like proof of Value, proof of posting etc.

I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards

Terri

Dear Mr Hutchings

Thank you for taking the time to come back to me. Firstly can I say that I am sorry to hear that you have sent an item of mail and the recipient advised you the contents were missing. Clearly on this occasion there has been a problem which is unacceptable.

If I can explain we do not keep records of ordinary First, Second Class and Recorded Delivery

signed for items as they travel through the system due to the volumes handled everyday and this fact alone makes it very difficult for us to say exactly how or where a problem has occurred. Having said this, I understand the anxiety such matters can cause our customers and I can assure you that incidents of this nature are taken very seriously.

If any items come into any Royal Mail delivery offices damaged or opened then all of the staff are aware of the correct procedures for handling such items. To explain any mail that comes to hand damaged or opened should be placed in one of our official Royal Mail damage bags before it is delivered. For our customers reference the bag has printed details of how to contact Royal Mail about the item enclosed if necessary. I would like to give my assurance that we at Royal Mail are not complacent about the quality of service and we are constantly striving to ensure that our customers receive the level of service they have every right to expect.

Also thank you for letting me know the specific issues that you have experienced with our website. I have forwarded on your comments to our web design team for their consideration. Once again I am so very sorry that you have had this poor experience with us and as a goodwill gesture, I will be sending you a book of six first class stamps to cover your costs. I do hope that this small gesture will go some way to restore your faith in us.

If I can be of any further assistance then please do not hesitate to contact me. Kind regards,
Terri

(Endnotes)

- 1 http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sectors/support_services/article3892886.ece
- 2 "Computer Says No." *Private Eye* 1298 (2011): 28
- 3 www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/may/26/canada-post-boss-heading-for-royal-mail
- 4 <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/postalservices.html>
- 5 <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-1726953/Insolvent-Royal-Mail-paysboss-780000.html>

Spectral Stories

Here we find ourselves
gazing at overgrowth,
from a place where
there may be no remorse
for time's passing,
Even the earth breathes
sighs of relief with us,
almost audible until
a path beaten through
this abandoned place
betrays the image of desolation.
We are not alone.

for Hopeful Monsters

Where monsters prevailed
we creatures have followed,
And the ghosts that remain
in the landscape are
poised to speak of stories
sketched in spectral alphabet
for their audience,
the ancestors of the world,
who seek to survive in
the place made for themselves.
Yet are we hopeful enough,
To face this predicament?

Becky Ayre is a writer, photographer and researcher of the built environment. Some of her recent imaginings have popped up on beckyayre.wordpress.com.

Abigail Jones, *The Right One*.

It started with the boy baby who was wearing a large flesh-coloured eye patch. The patch was there to correct a squint or to conceal some kind of wound probably, and it made the people in the bus station waiting-room feel sorry for this baby, who was obviously a person you'd feel especially sorry for; on account of his age, etc.

The baby was unsuccessfully trying to play with a gulping, lifeless water-cooler on the terminal floor; when a female toddler plucked past. She was provocatively swinging a large toy rabbit. There was nothing discernibly pitiable about this child. She was the right height, with tremendous balance and a particularly developed sense of independence. Her predominantly pink clothes looked slightly grubby, but she was bright and functional. Clearly she could look forward to an active and rewarding childhood.

The boy child looked up as the girl child stumbled confidently past. He had a sweet, glooming, slightly unattractive face. The people liked him instantly. They didn't know what was wrong with him, but there was *something*. To look around, the boy had to swing his face at an awkward, peering angle, on account of his large bandage. Only having only available eye on his side meant that he had a faulty sense of perspective: he kept reaching for things when they weren't there at all. He stuttered little frustrated cries as he tried to stand up and then tumbled back to the floor; rubbing his eye patch. It was obviously an absolute tragedy, the people thought – particularly at *such an early age*.

Twenty yards away, the female toddler shrieked with excitement as she and the toy careered around a pillar. She circled it with clumsy frenzied steps. The people began to dislike the girl a little: a bit of an actress, a 'drama queen'. As far as they were concerned, she was flaunting her mobility. They had followed the manner in which she had stamped past the eye-patch boy, and had seen her curl her eyes towards him to check that his envy was sufficient, swinging the rabbit obnoxiously by its foot.

The waiting individuals, it must be said, were moved by the way that contrasting physical and medical factors had clearly shaped the 'life experiences' and thus the characters of the children. It was clear; they quickly surmised, that the bare-faced buoyancy of the girl child was basically a *big slap in the face* for the boy (who clearly hadn't asked for a disability or a flesh-coloured bandage, especially at such a pivotal point of his development). The whole scene made the people feel uncomfortable. A prickly atmosphere of mass embarrassment united them.

Of course, as the girl was really only a baby, some of the people recognised that they couldn't reasonably expect her to be sympathetic to the complex and subtle factors that surround engaging properly with those who are physically or mentally impaired. Actually, reflected the fair and righteous people, they were really absolutely *okay* with the girl and had nothing actually against her per se – particularly as she was a baby and was obviously totally innocent of malice and clearly (largely) a pleasant individual. It was just that this infantile parade of super-competence made the people slightly disapprove of this child who, it could reasonably be assumed, was in a vastly more favourable position than the boy baby, who had some kind of *problem*.

The boy rolled the water cooler away. It glugged sadly towards a bench. He got up with a stagger, and started in the direction of the girl and the tremendously huge rabbit, tiny nostrils flaring intently, fists pumping like a boxer. The toddlers met with a collision in the middle of the waiting area, and there they reeled unsteadily opposite each other for a while. Dazed with the realisation





of the other, they circled enviously like two pathetic beasts in a ring. A little breath of energy spread across the benches of watching people, who looked on nervously. The boy, fascinated and open-mouthed, fumbled towards the rabbit, trying to pull it away from the girl, who squealed with irritation and, peddling her palms, pushed him away. The boy toppled down instantly and started yelping.

The watching people felt uncomfortable. Where was the boy's mother anyway? More to the point, where was the *girl's* mother? Certainly not teaching her good manners! One of the spectators sitting nearby, a tall woman, got up and fluffed her skirt impatiently, looking around and resting her hands on her back. This action said to the other waiting spectators 'Like you, I feel upset about this situation. I nominate myself as the one in charge of our collective discomfort, and I am signalling to the as-yet unmoved mothers of the boy (good) and the girl (fine, but probably bad) that they need to act, like, *now*.'

The girl's mother showed up first. Which was typical. The people watched her with undisguised disapproval as she bounced her daughter into her arms and strode off, smiling. She was young, sexy and, judging from her walk and hairstyle, the people observed, a bit of a drama queen herself.

By this point, the boy had stopped crying and was sitting on the gritty terminal floor, bored and lonely. He crawled towards the water cooler, which was still lapping under a chair. Swivelling around, he found that everyone in the terminal was looking at him. He lifted his glooming eye-patch face up to the ceiling and laughed.

Abigail Jones is a wandering artist and writer. Her autobiographical series *A Taste For Perfection* can be found on atasteforperfection.blogspot.com.



*In a house made of stone
Bone to bone live all alone.
But as night falls down the Lane
Lifeless heap creeps back into the game.*

(Just a day, another day till the end I will prevail... Where did I hear it? No, wait a minute, it was in that book I read the other day –)

- Doll! Would you come over for a minute?!

silēntium

- Jaaaaaade!!!

- What mother?

- The pumpkins are ready for picking. Please go to the greenhouse and get a couple. I am making soup for dinner.

Izabela Lyra, Jade

Jade is not special. She is just like any other confused adult on this overpopulated dot in the universe. She has just turned twenty-two and proclaimed herself a fashion guru. Like many others she was diagnosed with GEMS at the tender age of eighteen. Since then Jade has been under the observation of Medwitch.¹ They have been monitoring her daily intake of electromagnetic waves – the suspected origin of her troubles. Medwitch also observed Jade's responses to the social structures she was a part of as, according to them, this intervention was necessary to understanding GEMS. Although a fairly common dysfunction nowadays, it could never be *fully* comprehended. How can you ever understand the individual's unique perception, right? Moreover, treatment carries a slim chance of full recovery as it mutates, becoming fused with the carrier's personality. Depending on an individual's susceptibility, a course of the disease could take a treacherous turn and become dangerously entrapping, eventually leaving the carrier unable to distinguish the Real Reality (RR) from the Virtually Accessible and Televisionary Environments (VATE). The standard therapy didn't lead to eliminating the source of the disease altogether, but was based on lowering the rates of intake. The best possible therapy since, according to statistics, the more radical Rapid Underload proved to be fatal in consequences.

The troubled young woman walked the narrow paths between vegetable beds trying to recall what 'pumpkin' was. She vaguely remembered seeing it on a visual transmission screen (VTS) but somehow it looked different there: about seventy centimetres circumference, a perfect sphere (VATE's preference for geometrical speaking where applicable is well known) and an impeccable orange colour, without any stains of green underdevelopment. The newest VTS's were equipped in perception enhancers, like the small emitters of relevant scents to complement an image. She could not stop what followed. The arbitrary experiences began flooding her head. Colours – juicy and tangible, shapes – edible... desire, youth, beauty and at all time – style...!

Then she remembered. These hunting memories could not be pushed out for good. She remembered being at a fashion show. She sat with her press pass, second row. 'Good look-out', she thought.

The first fit came unexpectedly, triggered by the sight of a peacock-feather gown embroidered with hundreds of sparkling diamonds. The to-die-for dress was worn by a recent celebrity-turned-model. The woman was good at it! Her well-oiled heavy locks, willowy frame and slender limbs, complete with a parading horse gait and a satisfied smile on her glossy lips were calculated to trigger a jealous fit...

Jade returned to the reality of the garden. She found a VATE pumpkin lookalike. Walking back home she let herself drift again...

'It' happened for the first time at that show. The feeling crept over her, something she could not recognise. She felt nauseous, got up and walked towards the exit. At home she sat in front of her VTS. Switched it on and watched the very same show she had left over an hour ago. She felt the creeping sensation again, but this time allowed it to overwhelm her.

vox inanis

(Who am I?)

For most of my life I haven't felt comfortable nor at ease living it. I don't care who else feels the way

I do, although I'm certain many do. All I want to know is what it means and what to do about it.

What seems to be a problem?

I don't know who I am.

How does my emptiness reveal itself? I don't see the point in undertaking tasks or in discovering things. I'm always discouraged even before I start. Mostly I think about all the negative shit in the world, which happens because of the most vicious of all the animals. I consider myself a mild misanthrope. A mild one, because I have not completely lost my faith in humankind. I cling to some sightings of charity and other manifestations of benignity, even though the evil overwhelmingly supersedes the good deeds. Hence my interest in watching people's struggle; call it competition if you like. But not openly in first contact, I like to watch them in 'cages' like lab-rats, battling, competing, and showing off in 'reality TV' shows. I particularly enjoy the 'racing' and the 'surviving,' perhaps because they're more like athletic competitions and therefore much 'cleaner' and straightforward, than for example "The Singletons Farm" where females compete for males and vice versa. I suppose an outsider could say I practice safe voyeurism. Facilitated two centuries ago in the advent of mass media and the mass consumption, Virtually Accessible and Televisionary Environments have changed my [our?] attitude to people: they ceased to be my kin – partners and brothers – but became the subjects of my hungry gaze. Like toys to makeover and play with. Maybe that is why I want to dress them up and re-shape their dull faces! Ugliness all around!

I'm falling)

dēinē

She did not recognise then that she had fallen into the deceptively friendly tentacles of enhanced reality. Interestingly enough nobody can ever know who Jade is and how she feels, not even herself. Does she recognise and accept being in the custody, in the overwhelming presence of the Green Eyed

Monster Syndrome? Well, it certainly drives her. It makes her uncontrollably want things, gives meaning to her life. It does not however make her special. At a later point, she might come to an instinctive realisation that the probability of almost everybody being secretly smitten by GEMS is high. We don't admit it even to ourselves. After all, living in denial is a domesticated human trait indeed ...

(Endnotes)

1 A private health care system incorporating a brand new generation of doctors. Their practice comprises of mixing traditional Western biomedicine and highly advanced Indigenius methods.



Nyx *a noctournal*



